Antithesis

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Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Major Character Death
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Character:	Harry Potter, Tom Riddle | Voldemort, James Potter, Lily Evans Potter, Albus Dumbledore, Hogwarts Students, Hogwarts Staff, Draco Malfoy, Theodore Nott, Blaise Zabini, Daphne Greengrass, Hermione Granger, Bellatrix Black Lestrange, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, Severus Snape, Ron Weasley, Luna Lovegood, Nagini (Harry Potter), Order of the Phoenix, Death Eaters - Character, Pansy Parkinson, Ginny Weasley, Nymphadora Tonks, Astoria Greengrass, Original Characters, Newt Scamander, Mundungus Fletcher
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Antithesis

by Oceanbreeze7

Summary

Revenge is the misguided attempt to transform shame and pain into pride. Being forsaken and neglected, ignored and forgotten, revenge seems a fairly competent obligation at this point.
Skylar is the boy who lived, that's why he's important. I'm not Skylar.
Going to Hogwarts is part of the plan, waking the basilisk is part of the plan, taking potions, learning spells, being tortured, murdering others, watching people di-

> *I'm going to tell you a story, although it's a bit long. I'm going to make you listen, because I want you to understand how you made me a monster. I'll call this story antithesis, and you're going to learn every single moment where things went wrong. I want you to cry, and beg for me to kill you, and when I'm done with this, you're going to want to do that to yourself. You're going to listen, because in the end, you owe me that much. You owe me so much more, but here we are, and this is how it's going to end. Who knows, maybe this useless battle between you and me and this bloody world, well, maybe we always were fated to kill each other.*

~~Do you know what it is like to be unmade?~~

Notes

This story is the rewritten attempts for myself to write something actually good.
The original story is one called Shadowed Malice and a bit of nasty work.
The link to the original completed story is here:
https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7179133/1/Shadowed-Malice

Please comment if you would like to say something regarding the original story.
Yes, a few things are going to change.

See the end of the work for more notes

Origin

Chapter Summary

Where I end and you begin.

Chapter Notes

This story is a rewrite, although differs dramatically from the original (located on FF).

This story has multiple serious adult topics and themes, please check the tags for a specific warning although I will detail a few topics below.

This story has major themes of:
Realistically written Major Depression
Realistically written Child Abuse (Negligence- no physical abuse written) and effects of it (personality disorders, altered perspectives, self worth issues).
Realistically written Self-Esteem and Self-Perception distortions
Implied Eating Disorders near end (disease induced over consumption. May be uncomfortable for a few readers). Also mentioned emaciation and underweight.
Multiple flashbacks and PTSD themes from witnessing deaths and trauma
Mental breakdowns and (rare) psychotic episodes
Abusive relationships (between children, bullying, purposeful manipulation, etc.)
Prescription drug use (or potion use?)
Brief mentions of vomiting.
Heavily detailed scenes of grief.

This story has NO romantic pairings between main characters. Any romantic scenes or relationships are original to canon, and not detailed.
The story is depressing and long and dark, please be aware of dark depressing themes.
Please, if you need a break at any point I *understand*, you always come first.
Remember that.

Here's a fan-made playlist for Antithesis!

The wind rustled sharply through the bare branches of ancient trees. The rattling noise was familiar, having occurred many times already throughout the night.

The small town of Godric's Hollow seemed to hold its breath as an unwanted visitor prowled slowly across cracked cobblestone.

The shadows, thrown from the bare trees, lay warped on rock and ground, providing the illusion of nearly curling towards the lone figure.

It halted suddenly. His darkened cloak, half shrouded from the night itself, stood still in the middle of a barren street towards the end of one court. A single manor glowed with the warm lights of habitation. The sidings were old fashioned and decorated with iron rod fences and elaborate metalwork. Despite the bold statements of wealth, the look was tarnished with the wet splashes of ageing rust and dents along with the bases of each rod. A metal griffin, standing posh and incredibly out of place had been painted gold and red from the harsh corrosion only time could produce.

The gates groaned in protest as invisible claws forced the metal to bend. The gears twisted and obliged to the brute force, rattling loudly as they collided against the frame once extended entirely upon their hinges.

The two adults who held ownership of this manor had left, celebrating a Halloween Party only after immense amounts of poking and prodding. The two had been resilient, only after false securities and half-hearted assurances were they finally convinced to leave.

The party, a small seemingly insignificant event suggested an opportunity that had otherwise been impossible. The situation had dramatically shifted to something bitterly sweet once more details had been cautiously uncovered.

Two infants were left inside the house, a squib witch hired as a temporary caretaker.

He understood the reasoning behind such an ignorant (or naive) action. A squib, integrated to the muggle society so thoroughly he hadn't even been aware of her blood relatives until only recently. Such an outlandish choice for a caretaker was unheard of- he wouldn't have suspected it for a moment. The decision although smart hadn't been made with proper precautions in place.

A twisted smile warped his face once a shrill alarm pierced the relative quiet. The heavily reinforced ward crumbled with the ghastly sound of something important cracking. The suddenness in which his movements shifted from almost entirely unheard, to loud chaos spoke some unnatural confidence in abilities normally shrouded.

The woman briefly appeared in the largest front-facing window, momentarily freezing before vanishing beyond the frame. The windows were of no matter. Having plotted so long and so tediously- he could spare a moment to indulge in his certain victory.

The windows and door exploded with a grotesque rain of wooden shrapnel and warped iron. The frames cracked, teetering and knocking several panels of the house's siding to the now ruined front garden. The carefully pruned lilacs and hydrangeas smashed into the ground and old mulch.

He strolled into the house, positively feeling giddier than he had in years. His only threat now was a useless waste of genetics, holding a kitchen knife with trembling arms.

He met her horrified eyes and knew that his own burned in excitement.

"Please! I-" she sobbed, arms shaking more before she ran. She bolted like a spooked horse, her feet pounding on the floor towards the stairs. It made no difference; he took his time following after. The stairs squeaked as he ascended and glanced absentmindedly at a moving photo of a mud blood witch and a pureblood fool.

He heard the squib screaming in one room. The door had been locked with a flimsy metal clasp.

She sobbed wildly, begging gibberish as she held her head and long hair between spastic fists. Hysterical, he felt a stirring of disgust for such an unseemly action. His lips twitched slightly, and the woman dropped dead, eyes glassy and mouth open in another wordless plea.

Two cribs, each on opposite walls of the room. They were separated by the squib's body and painted obnoxiously cheerful colours. Innocently they rested under little twinkling mobiles displaying special Quidditch equipment. The far crib held a chubby child with chocolate brown hair. He was curled in a tiny ball, clutching his pudgy fingers into the plush horns of an anatomically inaccurate dragon.

The other crib held a fairly opposite child. A possibly slim child, once accepting all infants had an unseeingly thick layer of baby fat. His hair was dark, nearly impossible to tell the specific colour with the lack of illumination. He slept on his side, one arm near its face while the other lay prone near its side.

He was silent. The names of both children were carved into each headboard respectively. The brown-haired boy has his name written with enchanted letters, glittering gold in bold font.

Skylar

The other was written in the same style and format, the letters a shimmering warm red.

Harry

Perfect.

The man let a small smile grace his normally unreadable face. Even the disgustingly *muggle* names wouldn’t ruin the thrilling glee that pulsed through his blood. He lifted his wand but hesitated. His eyes shifted, glancing between both cribs pensively.

Which child was the imminent threat foretold? His resources had told him that both children were born the same day, almost identical to the specific requirements.

It didn't matter, overthinking it only ran the risk of the owners returning early and jeopardizing his spies.

"Harry Potter." The man mused, his voice caused Skylar Potter to frown in his sleep. Harry Potter shifted slightly, knocking a blanket to flutter between the railings. Harry's crib was on the right, flush against the wall directly across from Skylar.

It was sheer luck (or misfortune), that Lord Voldemort chose to start on the right side that night.

"The last piece needed," he mused, voice rising as he pulled the ivory-coloured wand out from a concealed pocket. His eyes focused on the gentle exhalations of the infant and magic coursed through his limbs in excitement, "how *fitting*, for your death to assure my life."

The infant wriggled, meaty fist closing and opening in a grasping movement. It's pudgy cheeks puffed out in a small gulping snort. It was positively disgusting.

He grimaced, rolling the wand between his long fingers before arching his wrist in the proper stance. With almost lazy movements, the tip pointed directly between the closed eyes of the child.

"Avada Kedavra." He could almost feel the cold talons of death as the spell wracked through the tiny body. He could see its chest stutter, convulsing sharply as its heart jerked and struggled. The infant's eyes opened and a piercing wail exploded from the small lungs. Harry jerked, the waves of frigid energy cascaded and escalated to an excruciating crescendo.

Harry wailed, thick tears falling from his eyes as his face reddened in his screams. His pudgy arms waved and pounded limply against the railing of his crib and the dead weight of his chest.

The spell travelled with precision to find the anchor of the infant's soul to its body. Harry Potter's instinctive magic rose in a wave, attempting to deflect the darker power or negate the effects.

The chilling talons raked across the invisible heart of the infant, leaving gaping wounds and rips across its soul. Having missed, the spell did all that it had been known to ever do- *kill.*

It deflected, scratching and with a startling unanticipated *wrench*, tore apart the nearest target regardless of which soul it had lacerated.

The dark magic held within the child's body was too much. With a pain-filled screech, a powerful backlash lunged through the mortar and wood. The already weakened structure groaned and ached wearily as it staggered into a state of disarray. The ceiling collapsed, walls burst, and the metal hinges melted. Nails and wood flew, giving a deep cut over the heart of Skylar Potter, painfully waking him up from his dreams, and giving him anguish over the wound.

Harry Potter groaned, collapsing backwards in severe weakness. The last remnants of dark magic

oozed in a numbing haze through a crack just below the infant's hairline. More chunks of wood fell, support beams crashed into the staircases and shingles collapsed through to the nursery. Both infants screamed even louder as the objects collided leaving broken bones and bruised skin.

Harry's eyes lolled, shifting slowly from deep emerald into something toxic as the last remnants of black magic left his skull.

Blood, ash, a single corpse, and a black recognizable cloak rested on the floor of the destroyed nursery.

That night cemented the future death of more than just a dark creature.

'What fun are prophecies if not to throw the unknown word of gods to simple swine and see what conclusions they misinterpret.'

Expo

Chapter Summary

Where even the most exciting things succeed in being horrid.

Harry Potter blinked and shifted quietly as he observed the chaos that had transformed his front lawn.

The grounds of the Potter Estate in Wochien had been entirely transformed with bright streamers of red and gold. Large fluttering kites filled the air, large sparking dragon kites roared and chased shimmering butterfly charmed twice the size of the reptiles.

A makeshift quidditch post had been set up on the western side of the large estate. The pitch, only half the size of a professional pitch, was equipped with miniature and charmed bludgers and an oversized quaffle.

At some point in the spectacle of paintbrushes bewitched to paint faces without the artist, or the exploding snap tournament on the far side of the patio, a bucking shelled pony managed to escape from its temporary pen.

Harry watched with faint amusement as a short wizard scrambled after to catch the strange magical creature (which seemed to enjoy his mother's hostas).

Harry flinched as two red-haired twins his father seemed to be rather fond of, managed to set off a large explosion of raining fire and iridescent pixie dust. His father in question turned from where he had been conversing with what looked like a ministry official to scold the twins. (Harry could see how his mouth quirked into a subtle grin at the two beaming boys.)

"Hello, young man!" Harry cocked his head upwards to stare at the woman and man who looked at him with a slightly uncomfortable smile, "Do you happen to know a young Skylar by any chance?"

Harry blinked, and with one hand pointed to the right where the quidditch pitch had been set up.

"Oh thank you!" The woman squealed, glancing down at him in strange adoration, "You must be a friend of his! I'm Mrs. Belstha!"

Harry stared as the woman thrust her arm out for him to shake. He reached up and clamped his fingers around two of her thicker digits.

"I'm Harry," Harry stated without much inflection, "Skylar is my brother."

The two wizards looked stunned before they quickly hurried to hide it with another strained smile.

"Well! You must be so proud of your brother then! Anyways, off we go! Such a pleasure to meet you!" She chirped, taking her husband's arm and rushing off towards the shrieks and laughter of the mock quidditch match.

Harry sighed softly through his nose and shifted from where he was sitting on the porch. The white wooden slabs had recently been repainted to a bright white, already dinged with black scuff marks.

Near Harry to his right, a spelled bowl clinked quietly with ice cubes filled nearly to the top of the lemonade. A platter of sandwiches sat nearby, a small snack considering the enormous cake set on the buffet table on the lawn.

Harry glanced out once he heard a muffled warning. A large bronze flamingo collided with the grown before rising with magical grinding movements.

"James Potter!" Lily- Harry's mother, shouted, "Did you charm my *lawn flamingo*!"

Harry's father, having seen the damage he had created started to hurry backwards with both arms raised in defense.

Harry watched as a black-haired male- Skylar's godfather Sirius, threw one of the spare brooms at his father. Lily cursed playfully, chasing after him as James hurried onto the broom to escape his mother's wrath.

A few people cheered both of them on, giving whoops as James soared over the crowd standing on the broom shaft in a dramatic pose. Lily took quick work using a water charm to splash her husband down into a conjured mud pile just below.

Harry kicked his feet and looked at his fingers with slight longing.

The party was Skylar and Harry's eighth birthday. His father's old friend group of the 'Marauders' had gathered last night at the estate and started planning the event.

Skylar, the outgoing exciting child that he was, quickly proclaimed that he would have the best party anyone ever had. James and Sirius jumped at the opportunity and started plotting how exactly they could smuggle a Czech Griffin through the wards.

Harry didn't mind, he didn't care about most things. He understood that Skylar was very different from himself- Skylar seemed to glow in the press and the hoards of people always gushing with gifts or thanks for his victory over the Dark Lord. Harry, well Harry preferred to stay back and just watch, he didn't like people talking or asking him questions he didn't know the answers to.

(It wasn't that his parents purposefully ignored him, the fact was he was far too different for them to understand so any attempts for 'family bonding' generally left him anxious and trying to retreat to his room.)

His introversion was why Lily wasn't at all surprised when she approached the porch to get a spare towel that had been set out earlier.

"Hello Harry," She smiled, a slightly tired and sorrowful look as she settled next to him, "you don't want to play with your friends?" she asked quietly with a little smile.

Harry jerked his head and rested his chin on his knees, "They're Skylar's friends," He muttered under his breath.

Lily exhaled softly through her nose. "I'm sure that doesn't mean that they won't play with you?"

Harry glanced into his mother's eyes, they were darker and prettier than his own unsettling eyes. He didn't like him, they were too bright and made people twitch.

"Skylar is the seeker," Harry stated, shortly and curtly. Lily's cheek twitched and he could tell that she bit the inside anxiously.

"Well, maybe you could be the-"

"People will get angry if I'm the seeker and Skylar isn't."

Lily shifted.

"Harry, I-" She started, looking apologetic and tired at the same time, "I, I know that you didn't want a party-"

"It's Skylar's party."

"-But, how about we go to that magical animal exhibition that's near town?" Lily offered, trying to compromise, "They'll be moving on Thursday, but I'm sure we could find the time."

Harry frowned, "Dad and Skylar don't like magical creatures unless they breathe fire."

"Well, you don't like parties."

Harry stared with uncomprehending confusion. Lily looking uncomfortable and sadder than before.

"Harry I- I know that we haven't been the *best*, but you have to understand-"

"Skylar is the Boy-Who-Lived and needs extra protection because dark wizards still are angry with him," Harry chanted blankly with no tone of voice, "I know mum, Skylar is more-"

Harry cut off when Lily started to get up and looked torn and somehow furious, "Harry, I- how about tomorrow we head over to the expo. Just you and me? I thought there was something about a baby hydra there," Lily coaxed, smiling as Harry shyly glanced up hopefully, "I know your father isn't fond of reptiles, except Merlin knows he has a problem with dragons, but-"

"I think I'd like to go," Harry quietly mentioned, at once looking apprehensive, "I mean, It's okay if we need to clean up, or if Skylar wants to go somewhere else. I don't *have* to go, I can always-"

"We're going." Lily firmly stated. The moment was ruined when a witch called out for Lily loudly, having her grandson timidly hiding behind her large green frock coat.

Lily looked torn, but eventually, the nasally cries for her company won out and she hurried over the lawn to greet the new guest.

Harry glanced back at the white paint on the deck and scraped his nail across the path of a particularly adventurous ant.

The day continued similarly, with few guests saying hello to Harry and even fewer actually remembering that he too had a birthday. The uncomfortable small talk just led Harry to believe further that they had only come for Skylar (didn't everyone?) and speaking with him was just pleasantries.

He knew that, and he knew that the party was for Skylar. Yet a portion of him felt hollow and made him gasp for ragged breaths when he saw his father hoist Skylar onto his broom with him to dive-bomb Sirius with muggle water balloons.

Harry didn't like flying anyway.

Lie.

If he did, he wouldn't like sharp dives or sudden turns.

Lie.

He was perfectly content sitting on the porch and watching everyone else laugh and give Skylar his birthday presents.

Lie.

Harry was perfectly fine with the arrangement, he didn't need a party and he had come to not expect one.

It still made him feel like something had cracked inside.

Something came up, which Harry had expected would happen anyway.

Why would he be hopeful over visiting some sort of magical animal exposition when he knew that Skylar would demand attention or have some sort of after-party request the family would oblige to?

(He had learned that there was no point getting hopeful over things that most likely wouldn't happen anyways.)

Instead, it was Remus Lupin, his very own Godfather who had informed him early the next morning that they would be seeing the expo.

This had surprised Harry, he had been quietly told by his father that his Godfather was not entirely human. The thought hadn't ever concerned Harry, yet he hadn't ever considered that the man would want to see an array of magical oddities behind bars.

"You ready to go?" Remus asked awkwardly, wearing a slightly too big worn brown cloak. Harry glanced at his own clothing, a large jacket and his own loose pants. It wasn't as if they would have been walking into the nearest town.

Harry gave a small nod, taking Remus' huge grip with one of his smaller hands and grasping tightly. Harry flinched, resisting the urge to gag as his entire body was ripped backwards with the sensation of something pulling too sharply on a large belt. He stumbled once light flashed again. Remus hurried to kneel and steady the younger boy, who blinked in confusion but still looked around in restrained excitement.

They were in an open plaza where many stalls and glass cages had been set up. Magical creatures prowled or sat dopey behind the glass.

Remus looked uncomfortable, seeing one Manticore which stiffened and snarled aggressively once smelling the man. Harry tried not to pay any attention, but very quickly once entering the main pavilion all magical creatures seemed to hone in on Remus and snarl aggressively.

Harry's chest began to tighten once they noticed a rather suspicious-looking aid drifting closer to their position.

'*Don't do this, not today. This was supposed to be for me,'* Harry thought quietly, already feeling the bitter tang of having to leave only half an hour after arriving.

'This was supposed to be my party,' Harry's throat twitched and much to his horror, he felt his eyes start to glaze.

A security guard frowned at the two of them, slowly advancing towards them through the tiny crowd. His eyes were locked on the elder and had drawn his wand cautiously.

Harry bolted, running and ducking through the crowd as he heard Remus shout his name in alarm. Evidently, the security guard had not been noticed.

'It's not fair!'

He ran through a half-opened door, propped open only by a small crate. Running through, he kicked the crate but wasn't quite fast enough to avoid the thick door from snapping shut on his ankle.

It had obviously been enchanted in hindsight, magicked to avoid animals from escaping. The door snapped shut and cracked loudly against his ankle. Harry shouted out in pain, tears now sliding down his cheeks as he whimpered and hugged his knees close to his body.

'It's not fair- It's not-'

There was a buzzing in his ears that seemed to only get louder.

'Why does- why does everyone spoil everything?'

The buzzing was loud and his ankle hurt and- was his nose bleeding?

'Why can't I have a nice thing for once?'

He heard something shatter like ice under strain. He glanced up, trying to wipe his nose as a sudden wave of dizziness struck him.

Cages holding sleeping creatures had somehow cracked- spiderweb hairs that were growing larger and larger.

Star filled pupils focused on the cracks from behind the ward, long forked tongues lolled out lazily as a webbed hoof stretched out.

Harry's heart jumped to his throat as the cracks finally reached a point of instability and collapsed like falling rain.

Something that looked suspiciously like a winged goat licked its fangs menacingly.

Harry scrambled back, ankle dragging limply and throbbing unbearably. The door had closed and locked behind him, most likely why it had been propped open originally. He could hear faint shouts and could only assume that somehow the cages outside had broken as well.

One oversized spider clicked its fangs and prodded the broken cage with interest.

"What- What is this?" Harry heard a quiet voice and scrambled to reply.

"Help!" He hurried out, his back now flush against the back of the door.

The fanged goat creature stumbled back, rearing at something Harry couldn't quite see. He held his breath and curled one hand into a shaking fist.

"*...Hello?"* A small head poked around the corner and glanced at Harry, it flicked its tongue twice, "*Oh, it's just one filthy human."*

Harry's eyes widened and the snake turned to look around its newly freed area.

It was large. The length Harry couldn't quite determine; It was as thick as Harry's thigh and likely larger still. It had a tan triangle head that was aiming the other way entirely disinterested.

"Wait!" Harry tried once again, swallowing quickly, *"Those things are scared of you and-"*

"You talk to me?" The snake swiftly turned its head and looked baffled with its reptilian snout, *"Humans talk to me? They owe me rabbits!"*

Harry floundered, *"I- I don't-"*

*"Hatch-mates are all gone. I don't need Hatch-mates, I can bite death,"*The snake suddenly reared, although small it opened its large mouth and unhinged impressive fangs with a terrifying hiss. Its tail slid around the edge, it too reared back and twisted suddenly with slit pupils.

Harry's eyes widened and he jerked back, accidentally hitting his injured ankle against the floor and yelping out a sound. The second head tilted curiously whilst the first continued to taste the air interested.

"*You smell of prey. Why do you smell of prey*?" The snake hissed, sliding half a foot closer.

Harry stared, "*I think I hurt my ankle.*" Harry swallowed, throat tight and eyes still watering, "*It- this was supposed to be a good day and now it isn't."*

"I think it is a good day. I got two mice, that's an extra mice. And you."

"Wha-" Harry blurted, trying to scoot further back as the second head submitted to sliding backwards as the main head slowly advanced. It opened its mouth menacingly- an extra set of fangs unhinged and slid into a slot behind the original set.

"I- No!" Harry shouted, eyes widening as his breathing accelerated, "*I am not food!"*

"You are prey."

"I'm human!"

"I'm Amfivena." It didn't seem deterred as it rose slowly to rear above Harry's head and in plain view of the locked door.

Something collided with the door and caused it to swing outwards suddenly. Harry cried out and scrambled backwards near the feet of a startled and concerned caretaker.

"Ay! You alright?" The man blurted, grabbing one of Harry's arms and forcefully yanking him further away from the agitated magical serpent, "Stay back! Bollocks, I knew we should have gotten rid of this thing!"

"Harry!" Harry looked up into the near-panicking face of his godfather, "Harry are you alright?"

Harry didn't say anything, instead, he watched as the caretaker managed to conjure a small whip he currently was smacking against the floor.

"No!" The snake spat, switching heads and quickly retreating, "*Not prey! Not prey! Won't bite, won't bite!"* It screeched, managing to convey how absolutely terrified the animal actually was.

"What's going to happen to it?" Harry muttered, feeling dazed over the entire situation.

"Eh?" The caretaker muttered, scowling as the snake hurried into its broken cage to hide, "Oh, probably sell this bloody thing for parts. Don't know why we still 'ave it, most are just sold fer love potions and that." The man grimaced, looking at his whip in disdain, "seems a bit off to have love potions from as ruddy a beast as that."

Harry stared, not quite comprehending yet still hearing the muffled cries of "*Won't bite! Won't bite! Share prey with! Den-mate!"*

"It's sorry," Harry offered, looking at the agitated caretaker, "It just wanted more food."

The man barked out a laugh, "Hah! Fat chance lad, that thing is a sure beast. I'll be happy when we drop that thing off."

"Share prey with human! Den-mate! Not prey!"

Remus carefully slid his hands under Harry's knees and under his shoulder. With one movement the older man hoisted the young boy up into the air away from any danger. The caretaker looked around the back room, running one hand through his hair. Harry could already tell that he was angry, so many cages were broken and the goat creature was bleating sorrowfully.

There was an unconscious Diricawl wrapped in nets and being levitated by emergency personnel that seemed to be cleaning up the scene.

Harry's gut twisted once he noticed blood on the floor.

"What's going to happen?" Harry asked quietly, watching as more animals were shoved away and more blood was quickly cleaned up.

"They'll probably move on a tad bit earlier," Remus replied calmly, although his voice was very strained.

Harry felt an uncomfortable knot in his throat which pulsated in rhythm to the lolling stab of pain originating in his ankle. It bounced limply with every step Remus took, hanging from an awkward position.

"What about the animals?" Harry asked concerned, he rather enjoyed animals. They were much more accepting and listened to him talk most times, he didn't want them to get in any trouble because of him.

Remus said nothing and instead locked his jaw slightly.

Harry felt the knot in his throat press on his chest with uncomfortable pressure. Why wasn't Remus answering his question?

"No, No!" He heard the sudden piercing scream from the Amfivena. "*Not want! Sorry! Is sorr-"*

The cry cut off partway through. Remus shifted Harry although showed no signs of having heard. Harry stared, eyes locked on the door that had been forced open where the snake had quieted suspiciously.

"I didn't mean to-" Harry blurted, feeling the heavyweight of guilt pressing on him.

Remus looked down and shook his head softly, "Oh, no Harry, none of this was your fault. You don't have to be sorry for anything."

Harry looked down, eyes glazing and clouding.

It was his outburst that had led to the snake's sudden hush. If he hadn't have reacted or outburst, the blood wouldn't have been spilled.

Who had been hurt? Who had *he* hurt?

They reached the far door and Harry had not yet heard another sound from the snake.

"I'm sorry too," Harry whispered.

With the sudden excitement over this story, I've found myself constantly working on plot devices and other components.
I've also managed to indulge myself in doodling some fanart that will be open for public.

It is located on my personal tumblr- you do not require an account to view.
Feel free to follow, as I will likely post story updates or just writing updates and more art as time continues.

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Chalice

Chapter Summary

In which Mundungus Fletcher triggers an epiphany

In the tumult of events that transpired at the Magical Creature Expo, the Daily Prophet recorded two serious injuries and the legal requirements for euthanasia of seven magical creatures.

According to the paper, the legal requirements stirred up an activist group who were highly opposed to the unfair treatment and imprisonment of magical creatures.

The Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures specializing within the Beast Division was particularly under scrutiny. Moreso now than ever according to the apparent disregard for one rare Bowtruckle, a now endangered species, which had been caught in the crossfire of the ministries responding aurors.

The Bowtruckle in particular, stated within the paper as *'A harmless tree-dwelling creature that is difficult to find, and has great significance. The Bowtruckle species was once used commonly to find healthy trees or wooden material suitable for magic conduits. Now due to the Bowtruckle's recent endangerment in attempts to track alternate wood sources for conduits for dark arts, the species have nearly vanished in its natural habitat. This decrease is directly correlated to an increase in magical accidents through wand material experimentation. The greatest incident recorded was in Northern Amiens, France. This incident resulted in fourteen muggle and wizard deaths due to the magical explosion of an incorrect conductor-'*

The paper continued on. On the second page numerous witnesses had described the chaos as well as their obvious bemoans over the life of the Bowtruckle. The page after that regarded the current attempt for habitat restoration and conservation for the species, and the bills being thrown at the Ministry in regards for the safety and wellbeing of magical creatures under a class one rating.

Harry read the paper quite thoroughly, he had nothing better to do since he had been forced to remain in bed as his ankle reduced in swelling and healed. There were a few words he didn't understand the meaning of, as well as a few descriptions of current bills and decisions made by ministry officials.

He read the paper very carefully, even rereading it once he had finished.

Not once did it mention the Amfivena.

(He never really expected that it would have.)

The house was whispering in quiet murmurs.

Harry awoke silently in his room as the white noise lulled him out of sleep. His room was dark, the windows didn't offer a hint of sunlight or reveal just how late it was.

The murmurs rose in pitch, distinguishing themselves in the incoherent noises of multiple voices.

Harry slid out of his bed quietly. He took a few steps- his ankle had already healed although hadn't been tested yet. He hobbled slightly to the door, turning and peering out into the dark hallway. The further he walked the less his ankle hindered his movements. Once reaching the main staircase, he was walking fluidly and quietly down the steps towards the showroom where the light and voices were.

Harry approached the door, now able to distinguish the voices of his parents as well as an older wheezing voice and someone much younger yet with a thickened accent.

Harry padded forward, gently he opened the door to peer inside. He was correct with his original guess, both parents were in attendance. Alongside them was an elder man Harry recognized only due to his interactions with Skylar, and a short scraggly red haired man who had an uncomfortable grimy aura.

"Harry!" Lily suddenly gushed, running one hand through her hair in a nervous tick as she shushed him towards the door, "Out you go, back to sleep! Your ankle isn't well and-"

"It already healed." Harry quietly offered, silencing her fretting and peering around once more.

"Listen to your mother, this is a conversation for adults." James offered gently yet sternly.

Harry turned, not meeting the eyes of the two strangers. He shifted, about to close the door before he spotted the unmistakable blue of Skylar's pajamas. The boy in question was sitting in a chair, looking rather sleepy suggesting he had been there a while.

'Oh,' Harry thought, not understanding why he suddenly felt such a strange feeling, *'it's a meeting for the important people. Not adults, I'm just not supposed to be here.'*

Harry gave a small reluctant nod and trudged slowly out of the room. The door clicked quickly behind him, and the discussion started once again.

He couldn't find an excuse to lumber back into bed, despite the grating constant exhaustion. He walked with dragging feet and half opened eyes into the adjacent dining room. Climbing up onto a chair, he fiddled with one of the gilded Potter chalices that were always used for decoration. His thumbs traced the silver engravings and decorative marks. His fingers left small smudges against the precious metal- he'd likely have to polish it.

Tracing the marks and arches of the cup repeatedly provided him the necessary distraction to stay awake as the muffled voices continued endlessly. They began to meld in the back of his mind to an incessant chatter.

A door opened and clicked shut; the sound itself was very quiet but the harshness of its spontaneity made it ring clearly. Harry jerked his head up, looking as the short man ran one pudgy fist over his fading hairline. The man spotted Harry, and with a crooked unusual smile he waltzed over, trailing one hand over the crown moldings along the walls.

"Hiya," He greeted, yanking out the closest chair with one leg before plopping down on the edge, "You're the other kid, right?"

Harry blinked slowly, and nodded quietly.

"You should probably scamper off," the man rolled his eyes, "Don't wanna be around for *that* mess."

“What mess?” Harry asked, shifting to look at the other man fully.

“Well, looks like we got *more* clowns tryin’ to out your folks,” The man gave a cruelly twisted grin, “Looks like people are out for your family, mate.”

Harry tilted his head curiously, “People are always out for us.”

“Ah,” The man crooned, leaning forward as if to tell a secret, “But this time, I got word that they’re gonna *getcha.”*

Harry sat back alarmed, that and also disgusted by this stranger’s breath. Out to get them?

“Eh, don’t worry kid, we’re gon scramble you.” The man eased, clapping his hands dramatically, “One of ya over *here,* one over *there,* and *boom*- you’ve *vanished.”*

Vanished? Splitting up?

“We’re leaving?” Harry asked quietly, hands clenching around the cup harder, “Where?’

The man shrugged, reaching out and plucking the cup from Harry’s hands. Harry blinked, hands falling onto the table as if stunned.

“Eh, I dunno.” The man shrugged, tossing the cup in his hand and inspecting it closely, “Your brother, he’s heading off with your pops and that Dumble’s bloke, off for training or someth’g ruddy like that.”

“Oh,” Harry sighed, blinking bluntly as his mind quickly collapsed to disconcertingly blank.

“Eh, I heard your head’n off to your cousin or someth’n. Your mum’s got it covered, says nob’dy look there.” The man grinned, teeth were discolored and his breath stank of something burning, “Look’s like you’re going on your own little trip.”

Harry’s hands started twitching and he curled them under the table and out of sight.

The man slapped Harry on the shoulder once, before jumping to his feet. “I’m Mundungus Fletcher, and I’m takin’ this. Hope ya’ don’t mind.” The man winked, brandishing the cup.

“But that’s-”

The man popped and vanished.

‘-mine.’

Harry’s hands shook and trembled with something strong. His mind was blank, and he felt strangely void from the room.

He wasn’t- he *couldn’t* be sent away. That was, it was a ridiculous idea-

‘Don’t get excited over things that probably won’t happen anyways.’ he reasoned, eyelids sliding down halfway again, *‘Why, why would they actually keep me?’*

He tried to summon any sort of instance where he had been thought of or given special privilege over Skylar. He tried, yet he couldn’t actually remember an instance. He felt as if he was swiping his hands through mist, attempting to find any sort of memory just out of reach.

(He knew, that there was no such memory. He knew it and yet he was desperate for *any.)*

‘They’ll send you away.’ his mind whispered, and he finally let himself close his eyes against the searing ache, *‘Even the man wanted the cup more than he wanted you.’*

The cup- the *cup.*

“Why do people take everything away from me?” He whispered, voice cracking halfway through as his jaw convulsed. He locked his jaw, biting against tooth as his skull ached and his throat was filled with a quaffle. His chest was rising and falling at uneven flutters-

‘I don’t-’ he glanced at the blurred outline of the door where the voices were discussing his dismissal.

Skylar wasn’t being sent away.

A single sob tore itself from his mouth, and a tear fell onto the shiny floor.

‘I’m sorry that- I’m sorry i’m not Skylar.’

He shoved the palms of his fists into his eyes and twisted. It *hurt* but it somehow gave some clarity to the situation.

He *had* tried, he had tried many times over and over to gain his parents attention. They were always too busy to listen to him or read to him like they used to.

They were always busy with Skylar.

(“ *Bad people want to hurt Skylar so mum and dad have to help him, i’m sorry Harry maybe in a little bit.* ”)

(It was always in a little bit.)

Harry hung his head and with small gulping breaths and shaking hands he made the slow journey up the stairs alone. He always had done everything alone, and he would feel weird if someone was to help him now.

Because in the end, he wasn’t Skylar.

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.

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(And Skylar was the one who got good things.)

Resort

Chapter Summary

In which Harry chooses the lesser of two evident evils.

"Harry!"

Harry bolted awake, scrambling and sluggishly struggling to stay upright on his bed. He failed as the mattress teetered once again, and with a warbling yelp he slipped out from under the covers onto the floor.

He heard snickering as he gingerly rubbed the spot on his skull which had collided with the ground. Uprighting and repositioning his lopsided sleeping apparel, he spotted impish hazel eyes and dark brown hair peering at him from over the blankets.

"Gotcha, didn't I?" Skylar snickered, straightening his back to peer down at still tired twin.

"Why-" Harry started, giving a small cough to clear his throat, " *Why* would you do that?" He winced, and cracked his back loudly.

Skylar didn't seem fazed by the loud popping, instead he shifted so both feet would dangle over the edge, socks swinging nearly close enough to hit Harry's face.

"Mum and Dad wanted us downstairs," Skylar shrugged, "They told me to get you."

"And you couldn't have just *knocked?"* Harry muttered under his breath, getting to his feet.

Skylar grinned and gave a wink before hopping off the bed and nearly skipping to the door, "See ya downstairs!" Skylar's face lit up, "Mum made pancakes! Our favourite!"

" *Your* favourite," Harry corrected, already grabbing a new shirt to change into.

Skylar shrugged in the doorframe, "Same thing."

Harry rolled his eyes and found a pair of pants. Glancing at the door, Skylar had already left, and without the decency of actually closing the door.

Harry changed quickly, sparing one look in a nearby mirror (there was no hope for trying to flatten the chaos of his scalp), before slipping into the hallway towards the stairs.

The sudden daylight and brightness of the estate made him almost forget entirely the night before. It felt like a dream, too implausible to be reality yet there was some sort of tint to it which caused him to doubt if he had only imagined it.

Each step caused some sort of tickling uncertainty to rear once more.

Had he actually imagined it?

(Had that man been right?)

“Harry!” Lily blinked, peeking through the archway and looking back at the table, “There’s pancakes if you would-”

“I’m okay.” Harry mumbled, walking into the kitchen and sliding into the one seat that was available.

There was a chalice missing on the table.

“Is there something important?” Harry asked quietly, swinging his feet under his chair. Skylar looked up from where he sat across from Harry, blinking with doe eyes and syrup running down his chin.

“Yeah!” Skylar blurted, swallowing a large clump of dough with a small cringe, “I got this!” Skylar gushed, reaching down into a pocket before pulling out a figurine.

The small fist sized griffin gave a miniature roar, flapping its small wings to create tiny gusts strong enough to knock over a blueberry. It paced on the tabletop, totally enrapturing Skylar’s attention.

“Where did you get that?” Harry asked quietly. It gave a little snap with its beak and pounced on a chunk of pancake Skylar offered it.

“Dumbledore!” Skylar chirped, eyes lighting up quickly, “You should have *seen* him- he’s the headmaster at that one school!”

“Hogwarts, sweetie,” Lily scoffed playfully, “You’ll go there too one day, Sky.”

Harry shifted uncomfortably as Skylar beamed and giggled a small amount when Lily poked his exposed cheek.

“Why was Dumbledore here?” Harry interrupted, bringing the two back on topic.

Lily’s expression faltered, shifting to something unsure. She wrung her hands and looked at the table with a very hesitant expression, “Well, we have to talk to you about that.”

Harry felt his jaw waver and tried his best to hold it still.

“Hey!” James poked his head in, blinking a few times. His glasses were slightly askew, he seemed startled to see Harry in the room.

(Given, Harry normally didn’t attend breakfast.)

“James! Good!” Lily sighed in relief, queuing for the man to come into the kitchen. At once, James seemed alarmed and tried to skitter out of the kitchen. “ *James.”*

He groaned in protest yet slid into the kitchen and plopped on the chair at the head of the table.

Lily walked over, somehow having a mug in her hands as she twirled one strand of hair behind her ear nervously.

“So,” James started, awkwardly rapping his fingers on the table, “Well, uh. You see-”

Lily scoffed and rolled her eyes, “Honestly James, alright.” She started, looking very seriously at the two children, “Do you remember that there are unfriendly people who are very upset with us?”

Skylar nodded eagerly, looking curiously at the parents.

“Well, we’ve learned that those people are trying harder to find us.” James clarified, looking worriedly between both children, “So we have to leave.”

“Leave?” Skylar gasped, mouth opening in surprise. There was a chunk of food between his teeth, “And go *where?”*

“That’s the thing,” Lily sighed, sliding downwards into the chair next to James and Skylar, “Albus- Dumbledore,” She clarified, “Says that he’ll be able to find us a safe place, but he wants to begin your training as soon as possible.”

“To defeat the death-munchers!” Skylar chirped, looking at James who seemed sheepish at the name.

Lily raised one eyebrow at James but nodded to Skylar, “Yes. They don’t like you- They don’t like Skylar, Harry dear.” She directed this time at Harry, “And they’ll hurt some of us to get to Skylar.”

Skylar looked worried this time, “What- *no!”* He cried, “No! Mum that’s not-”

“It’s okay, your father and I know how to protect ourselves.” Lily smiled, holding out her wand for Skylar to see.

“Your mother is right, we’ll be fine.” James wiggled his eyebrows in a reassuring way which seemed to dispel some of the nervous tension in the room.

It clicked in Harry’s head.

“I can’t defend myself.” Harry mentioned quietly, drawing all eyes on him, “I’m a risk?”

Lily reached over to take one of Harry’s hands, “We’ve thought of all the possibilities, and we thought that you could maybe spend time with Remus or maybe Sirius.” She offered.

“Or you could come with us,” James mentioned, he looked a little restrained with the idea, “It would… it’s feasible.”

Harry looked down at his hands.

“We think that Remus and Sirius may be targeted as well,” Lily mentioned quietly, “We aren’t quite sure what extend we all are going into hiding.”

Harry pulled his hand back from under his mother’s, and fiddled with a fork. “Where else?” He asked, looking up into Lily and James’ guilt filled eyes, “Have you thought of another place?”

Lily looked at James and paused for a moment, “My sister, Petunia.” Lily started, “She’s a muggle. She has a nice muggle family,” Lily smiled slightly and brushed back her hair, “Nobody would ever look in a muggle family, especially from a wizarding family.”

“Of course it’s your choice.” James interjected. “You can come with us, or Padfoot or Moony, or with Lily’s family.”

“But everyone is going into hiding?” Harry asked quietly. *‘Everyone can protect themselves. Except me.’*

“Everyone is. It’s not safe anymore.” Lily agree’d.

“We’ll have to be leaving pretty soon,” James explained, “A friend of ours is going to watch the house for a bit so nobody thinks we’ve left.”

Harry nodded and chewed his lip.

'I could come. But I'll just get in the way. Skylar needs to be safe and I'm going to make it worse.' Harry thought.

There was a part inside of him, that was *screaming* to say that he wanted to go with. That he wanted to *stay.*

"It's safer if I go?" Harry asked, voice rising at the end.

"Much safer," James agreed, "Nobody would look for a wizard in a house of muggles. It'll be safer for you and It'll be safer for-"

Lily swiftly shoved her elbow into her husband's side, causing him to jolt but silence himself immediately.

'It would be safer for Skylar.'

Harry bowed his head, and wrung his hands quietly.

"You don't have to make a decision, we just thought we should bring it up and-"

"I'll go." Harry accepted quietly, "If it's better for Skylar, I'll go."

Harry noticed how James and Lily both had an expression of utter relief on their faces.

"Thanks Harry," Lily smiled, rising from her chair and giving Skylar one last pat on his shoulder.

"I don't mind." He murmured quietly. Because in the end, Skylar was the boy to be protected and Harry was the boy who never was.

Skylar had a conflicted and strange expression. He looked down at the miniature Griffin and poked it half heartedly.

"Alright," James firmed, rising and scratching his chair legs along the flooring, "Best to get ready then."

"We're leaving *today?"* Skylar guffawed, "But, but what about all our things!"

"You can take them with you," Lily somberly smiled, "Those enchanted trunks we had picked out last summer- do you know where yours is?" Lily soothed.

Skylar nodded quickly but still looked rather put out by the recent information.

"Harry," James started, looking serious once more, "Your aunt's family are muggles, that means that most magical objects have to be hidden out of eyesight of any visitors or not exposed muggles,"

"Can I hide it in my trunk?" He asked quietly, James gave a firm nod. Harry rose quietly, sliding off the chair and walking across the floor out of the room. He knew James and Lily were startled but unsure what else to say.

"We won't be able to meet up often, just in case somebody is following us." James explained tersely, "It-"

"Take everything you want to." Lily sweetly yet abruptly added, "Is there anything we can get

you? Before you leave?"

Harry swallowed.

They wouldn't have otherwise offered, realistically they were supposed to have all focus aimed at Skylar, who was in the most immediate danger. There wasn't time nor was it worth the hassle to consciously worry about his welfare. Harry would be fine, he had long since learned that it was better to be independent and quiet than to seek attention when there was none to receive.

"No," he shook his head, leaving from where he had paused in the entryway. The stairs were creaky and seemed much more ominous than he had ever felt in the house. Suddenly, it felt far more imposing against his small body. The portraits seemed foreign and although they moved loudly in the frames, he heard nothing besides the pulsating rush in his ears. It pounded rhythmically and seemed to lull his state of mind into something soothing.

'This isn't real.' His mind assured him. He felt like he was watching the world through the eyes of an imposter, watching as his body moved without his conscious control, *'This is all fake.'*

He found some sort of perverse comfort in the knowledge that it was all most likely an illusion after all.

(It likely didn't ever matter.)

His trunk had had been enchanted and decorated with gaudy silver fasteners over the rich wood. It was larger on the inside, yet Harry didn't have any difficulty in sliding his multitude of personal belongings inside the confines and clicking the small clasp shut. The trunk was still large, as high as his torso and as long as his arm span. Sliding it out of his closet, he felt that his room had become alien to him. The few figurines or drawings he had taken from various newspapers were removed from the shelves and folded or stacked away safely. His walls were now bare and his bookshelf was lonely.

He paused at the doorway unsure. If they were to be leaving the house and traveling somewhere new, would anyone actually notice if he had snuck a few tomes from the many shelves of his mother's library? The collection wasn't as elaborate as the family libraries or studies of Skylar's friend's families, yet it did contain a fair number of books and novels.

The study was on the second floor on the other side of the house. It was furthest from the bedrooms, yet still a fairly well versed path. Harry looked up and down the hallway before trotting off quickly along the hallway. He wasn't particularly sure if he was *allowed* to take any of the books.

'If I ask, they may say no.' He thought to himself, pressing against the grandiose doors, *'So why ask at all?'*

Obviously his thinking was morally ambiguous, given any other situation or scenario he would most likely think or decide against. Considering with the ease both his mother and father expressed with his volunteering to be sent to live with family he had never met before; he felt the slow burning fire of irritation. He felt *smug* that the *least* he could do for himself, was to snatch a few books to entertain himself with wherever he ended up.

Harry didn't drag the heavy trunk through the hallways with him, so he was limited with the amount of books he could carry back to his room without being obvious with what exactly he had done. He was confident that he would have enough time to browse through the collection, since both parents were assisting Skylar at the moment.

So he was left with the suddenly overwhelming question of *which books* to take.

The more elaborate and complex books on runes or other mathematics had been sorted and placed on the bookshelves above his natural height. Just as well, he didn't think that reading about *maths* would at all be satisfying. Nor would History, or potions in his opinion.

His small fingers trailed along the thick covers of the many books on the magically enhanced bookshelves. He spotted volumes with strange titles or words he couldn't pronounce, let alone understand the meaning of.

There was a collection of spell books all published by a woman, *Miranda Goshawk.* Harry didn't know who the woman was, but if his parents had a complete collection of her works she *must* be impressive.

He tugged out one of the books which didn't seem to be a part of the main volume. *Goshawks Assortment of Spells and Charms* , a decently thick book with a leather cover and black ink. It seemed fancy enough, yet didn't have the sparkling font or the mass production feel that the other books had. He set it aside in the pile.

Magical Theory and Phenomena, written by Hasfalda Brickens, and *Scalding Scales* written by Silvanus Kettleburn, joined his pile and formed a rather thick stack.

Harry wished he could take more. He *knew* he could carry more books and run back to his room, but the portraits would likely tell his parents. In the off chance that the books he was taking weren't allowed to be removed-

' *This will be okay,'* Harry agreed, eying the actual thickness of the books. They would certainly offer him plenty of reading material.

He didn't need anything else. This would be *fine.*

(He wanted more, he easily squashed the desire and let it shrivel into something ugly.)

He gathered the three books in his arms and clutched the stack to his chest. He rushed out through the hallway and over the stairs back towards his room.

The trunk had plenty of room, the three books were set with loving gentleness amidst the rest of his knicknacks. His clothing provided a soft cushion for the rest of his objects.

He closed the trunk and locked it with the fluttering guilt of having stolen something.

He closed his eyes and pressed his forehead against the wood. The biting cold of the clasps brought some form of clarity to the foggy haze of his mind.

He was being sent *away.*

(Because he wasn't as important as *Skylar.)*

His jaw clenched and fingers spasmed around the wood. Why was it *fair* that he had to go?

Why was it that Skylar was the one who was allowed so many privileges and royalties?

What had *Skylar* ever done, that *Harry* hadn't?

"I'll be better." Harry muttered under his breath, eyes prickling and stinging as he fluttered them wildly. "I'll be *better."* He hissed under his breath.

What right did they have to *throw him away?*

Why was it, that Skylar got preferential treatment over something he did as a *baby?*

Harry had not ever asked for better treatment, or complained about favouritism. He accepted the unfairness and he said *nothing.*

And now they were going to just... *get rid* of him?

He scoffed quietly, he didn't *want* to stay with them if that was what they wanted.

Harry would learn and be a better wizard than Skylar ever would be.

(He would show them wrong.)

Intent

Chapter Summary

In which the Dursley households react far worse to an eight year old, than they would to a baby.

Chapter Notes

Hello there,
Linked below are two fanart pictures I felt important to link.
The first is drawn courtesy of your author, who should be Beta'ing more than doodling. Feel free to follow my tumblr, or keep your eyes peeled for the tag 'Antithesis' which will accompany my own drawings or updates.

http://digitalta.tumblr.com/post/147555504847/nagini-and-lutain-because-i-doodle-when-i-should

The second drawing is by my dear friend, who also, should be helping with Beta'ing (although I don't mind since her drawing is adorable.)

http://daenesty.tumblr.com/image/148453930567

If any of you feel the urge to mention or make something for this story, send me a message and I'll certainly post the link up here.

Also a shout out to a very helpful Beta from the website Fanfiction.net, Chooser of the Slain has proven to be invaluable.

The Dursley household had been grossly underprepared **--** or they hadn’t been notified **--** of their new obligation. An older wizard, whose name and whose relationship to his parents Harry didn’t actually know, arrived that night to side-along apparate Harry to their small abode later that evening. When they arrived, the old wizard knocked on the door, and started explaining the situation to the large, baffled man who opened the door.

Vernon Dursley, the man who opened the door, was as daft as he was large. It quickly became apparent that he was confused, infuriated, and then openly hostile. He grabbed a nearby lamp and brandished it like a weapon, pointing the bulb threateningly in the face of the exasperated wizard.

Harry’s mother was rather firm with raising her children with the knowledge of muggle gadgets and things.His father had been amused and had laughed at the many lessons that she taught their children, although he did end up learning a lot too. Those lessons were the only reason Harry was

aware that the lamp was, in fact, a lamp and not a weapon as the older wizard seemed to believe.

Vernon Dursley was quickly making a scene, his large face going red and his cheeks vibrating with the viciousness of his shouting.

A new woman appeared **,** dressed in a mint green robe, looking just as frazzled as Mister Dursley. When she caught sight of Harry, she grew pale and then rather dramatically swooned. Her body hit the ground loudly, her hair curlers rattling as her head hit the floor.

Harry's escort made some sort of objection and tried to make his way into the house. The large, loud man roared something angrily and tried to force him back out.

A child, roughly Harry's age but many times bigger, screamed something in shock and nearly the entire neighbourhood woke up in hushed confusion.

Harry exhaled slowly, straightened his back, firmly grasped his trunk, and bit back the growing sense of regret in agreeing to come to the Dursleys'. He was both surprised and frustrated with how quickly things had unfolded, but what was the *worst* thing that could happen?

It couldn't be any worse than what he'd already been through, could it?

The Dursley's, were a family of the worst people that Harry had ever met. They were as snobbish, rude, and arrogant as the worst of Skylar's friends.

Vernon Dursley, the head of the household, prided himself on being a successful, respectable provider for his family. In truth, he was greedy, selfish, and judgmental.

His wife, Harry's aunt Petunia, was a horse-faced liar who was always looking for rumours and gossip, obsessed with social status and maintaining the appearance that they were a perfectly normal family.

Their son, Dudley, was a greedy glutton and they spoiled him terribly. He'd learned exactly how to get what he wanted, throwing screaming fits if his parents didn't immediately capitulate. Harry

knew that, although Skylar had been spoiled a bit, he was nowhere near as rotten as their obese cousin.

Behind closed doors, the Dursleys made absolutely no effort to hide their blatant hatred for Harry and “his kind.” A growing part of Harry’s own heart felt the same way about them.

Harry’s trunk and a small cot had been thrown into a hastily cleared cupboard under the stairs. The ventilation flap was clogged with dust and, when he complained, Aunt Petunia gave him a nearly-clean rag and a bottle of noxious chemicals and told him to clean it himself.

The rest of the cupboard wasn’t much better. It certainly wasn’t fit for human habitation. Mould and mildew rotted the floor panels from wet shoes and thick cobwebs cushioned any sharp edges. The single lightbulb hanging overhead had long since burned out and no-one had ever bothered to change it.

When Harry told them that there was *no way* that a small boot cupboard was at all sanitary or decent enough for someone to live in, Vernon had shouted at him angrily for an hour about how ungrateful he was that they took him in. Harry thought about contacting his parents, or anyone really, to complain or retract his agreement… before he realised that he had no way to do so.

Post owls didn’t just swoop by whenever a wizard wanted to send a letter, he couldn’t just use any old bird, and even if he could, he had no way of knowing where his parents even were.

He was now *alone* .

The muggles seemed worried at first. They kept the window curtains drawn and talked in hushed, paranoid whispers. Vernon had to use some of his saved-up holiday days and he made absolutely no secret about how much he resented Harry for it, ranting about what a *waste* Harry was and how he wasn’t *welcome* here.

(Harry wasn’t welcome in his own home, so he wasn’t quite sure what to think with even the Dursley’s not wanting him.)

A week passed without incident and Vernon returned to work. The curtains were opened and Harry was set to work with a long list of odd jobs to do around the house.

Most of his tasks were lowly even for a house elf: pulling weeds and replanting flowers; washing the wooden panels; or hand-scrubbing oil stains on the concrete driveway. All of it was

meaningless busywork . It was just time consuming and more than anything else, *degrading* .

Harry had been washing the floors with a quiet, intense focus, when Dudley casually waddled in and *kicked over* the bucket of dirty water, sending it spilling everywhere. Aunt Petunia had shrieked in anger about how her clean floors were now *filthy* and how Harry couldn't do *anything* right.

'Maybe that's why your freaky family got rid of you! You can't do anything right, you waste of space!'

Of course, she'd refused to believe him when he told her that it was all Dudley's fault. There was no way her *precious* Dudders did anything like that. She sent him to his cupboard without supper.

At night, he managed to see just the smallest bit through the ventilation flaps on the cupboard door. It was just enough light to find the thin sheets and nestle in the near silence, until he woke up again from stomping steps just overhead.

It took over three weeks for his lightbulb to be properly fixed and Harry himself had to be the one to mend it, though he accidentally cut himself while doing so. When Aunt Petunia bemoaned some sort of muggle disease that you caught from rusty metal, he looked at her blankly, not quite understanding. His mother's lessons hadn't gone *that* far.

That was when she had realised that his upbringing was very different from normal, respectable children. He didn't need to attend public school. He already knew how to read and write and he'd already learned the expected mathematics. He already knew everything that a wizard was expected to know before going to Hogwarts. He was already well ahead of other children his age and honestly, he was rather baffled with how his cousin was struggling with his school work.

When they realised that Harry wouldn't be going to public school with his cousin, Petunia started giving him a longer list of tasks to do, while Vernon installed an external lock on his cupboard. They tried to get into his trunk, but thankfully magic locks were impossible for muggles to open and they'd quickly given up on the task.

Harry's diet now mostly consisted of scraps, or the most burn edges of whatever food he'd struggled to make that day. Most of it bordered the fine line between barely edible and toxic.

Toilet breaks were restricted and outdoor privileges were established and the part of Harry's heart

that hated them flourished in the depravity.

Alone in his cupboard, Harry came to a realisation, an epiphany of sorts that crept up on him over this first month rather than arriving suddenly. His mother *knew* what the Dursleys were like. She'd been *aware* of how cruel and selfish they were. And she'd still hoped that Harry would choose to accept this life and leave them, because it was *convenient* .

It was then, that very moment, that Harry found himself hating Lily just a bit.

The leaves had started to change colour and fall and Harry was sent outside to rake them up and see to the lawn. He did the laundry. He did the cooking. He did the gardening. He was, for all intents and purposes, just a house elf.

But other than giving him an exhaustive list of things to do each day, the Dursleys mostly just left him alone. They pretended not to notice him until it was time to punish him or give him more work, just like some purebloods pretended not to notice their house elves until they had need.

The days began to get colder and shorter, though his list of jobs never did. The large piles of leaves that Harry raked up each day always ended up scattered all over the grass the next morning. Dudley always seemed to wear that smug smirk at the sight of the front garden covered in debris. Vernon seemed particularly frustrated with the lack of progress, but he never lifted a hand against Harry.

He lashed out verbally instead and cruel remarks were common.

At first, Harry had recoiled and flinched from each drop of spittle that landed near him. It was disconcerting that, after *months* with no contact *at all* from his family -- he was beginning to doubt they even thought about him at this point -- and near-constant verbal assaults, he was becoming numb to it.

Harry still held out hope -- a fantasy where one of the family's post owls would swoop in at supper with a letter for him that the threat was gone and he could come home. Or that his mother would burst through the front door and take him back.

Winter arrived and the days didn't seem to last at all. He now recognised that something ugly had

begun to grow inside him. He'd been locked out one night and forced to try to find some slight shelter under the overhang of the back door. He was cold and he was wet and he was miserable and he just wanted his parents to come and get him and take him home.

But James and Lily never came.

He started to let go of the fantasy of being rescued. He started to hate them, James and Lily and Skylar, just a bit, just in the isolation of his cupboard, when he was alone with his thoughts.

Christmas came and went. Harry sat in the darkness, locked up in his cupboard on Christmas Eve. He spent Christmas Day under the stairs in his little cupboard, quietly reading his books under the single replaced lightbulb, with a plastic bowl for a loo. He spent the majority of Christmas break reading at the odd times of night, needing less and less sleep and kept awake by the numbing chill of winter permeating his cupboard. He was so cold and lonely and reading offered him some small comfort against his own treacherous thoughts, whispering that no-one would ever want him.

Instead, he read and practised and *tried* , over and over, again and again, he tested the theory of magic without ever actually knowing what he was doing.

And on the first of the new year, Harry smiled, happy again for the first time. He'd gotten the lock on his cupboard door to unlock.

'The wand is used as a conduit.

Magic, similar to the concepts of souls, is an aura surrounding and permeating all living Things.

Not being magical themselves, Muggles can be affected and altered with focused magic. Muggles are unable to store influxes of magic, thus are unable to harvest or use it on their own.

Wizards are able to produce and store magic.
Using conduits to direct the flow of magic, a wizard is able to alter the source into a specific object or energy if given enough intent and focus.

Spells are often used to direct magic in a specific fashion, each spell is created carefully to trigger a soul and magic response which will result in the desired effect. When combined with wands and proper wand movements, the magic is directed with an objective and pre-fashioned template which results in the desired outcome.'

Harry closed the thick book once again, running his fingers over the worn cover. The once crisp pages had long since become soft and almost fuzzy to the touch. Along the spine it had been stained with dirt and grease from his fingers. The back left corner of the book had cracked, the leather split from where it had hit against the floor a little too harshly. The letters were dulled and scratched, *Magical Theory and Phenomena,* was more difficult to read without struggling.

Harry had read the heavy book cover to cover twice already, understanding more the second time around. The theory of magic was more useful to him than the other book of spells. Although the book of spells did list countless spells and charms that did seem fascinating, Harry didn't have a wand, so he couldn't very well use the meticulously detailed descriptions of wand movements and pronunciations.

The last book he brought, *Scalding Scales,* was one of his favourites. He took comfort in the many pages, each drawn with magical ink which was charmed to move and swish
with each bat of the creature's tails.

He had opened his books many times in the dead of night, when he'd woken up unexpectedly, finding himself locked in the small cupboard. Watching Eelhounds swim through drawn water, or Swedish Shortsnout's breathing fire into the sky was enough to help him forget where he was, for a time anyway.

The days became longer and warmer and the frosts less frequent and less harsh. Harry's hands bled as his relatives put him back to work in the garden again.

His stomach had shrunk as he grew accustomed to less food. He found that fewer things amused him. The pages in his book only brought back nostalgia which was only painful to think about.

He set the book in his trunk, and locked it with a snap of his fingers. He had gotten good at unlocking and locking.

Dudley found it funny that his cousin had to work even in the rain, and he took great pleasure in tripping Harry and smashing him into the cement, soaking him to the bone while Dudley stayed dry in his brand new anorak.

Harry stumbled inside, dripping water only to be knocked back outside by a*broom.* Petunia had screamed angrily about how he was ruining *her* floors, never mind that Harry was the one who cleaned them.

Dudley came outside, having invited his friends over. One particularly rat-faced boy sneered at Harry and pushed him roughly to the ground.

Harry hit the ground, blinking blankly. He nearly hadn't realized what exactly happened- except the sudden throbbing on his back. He was distantly aware of them chortling at him.

It *hurt.*

Something in Harry snapped.

And then suddenly the rat faced boy screamed, his hands flew to his face and blood seemed to absolutely *pour.*

Dudley screamed, scrambling backwards and the blood spurted onto the wet pavement between them, staining the concrete crimson.

Petunia threw open the front door, screeching something in horror as the boy, Piers, was shouting and flailing.

People were shouting, shouting directly at *him* .

Harry felt someone grab the back of his waterlogged clothing, dragging him away from the mess on the cement driveway.

A fist hit his cheek, knocking his skull even harder onto the ground, and making him see stars. There was a deep throbbing and a small flash of warmth pounding behind his eyes. His neck felt wet and his stomach twisted with the sudden jerk of nausea.

His eyes rolled into his head when he felt something wet slide further down his neck. It was uncomfortably warm.

Harry was told that he had punched Pierce in the face, breaking his nose and sending him to the

hospital to have it reset. The Dursley's promised the mother of the hysterical boy that they *would* punish Harry for his outlandish behavior.

Harry was locked in his cupboard for three days. They'd given him just enough food to last, two cans of soup and a few bottles of water thrown at him before Vernon slammed the door shut and locked it with an ominous, final click.

Harry was returned to darkness, his uncle's unintelligible shouts and curses just on the other side of the thin door.

He didn't dare unlock the door or turn on the light when he could still hear the creaks of heavy footsteps just outside his cupboard.

Time blurred and distorted in a strange mixture of lethargy and restlessness.

His fingers ran over the pages of his books, already read and reread multiple times and each spell nearly memorized. The comforting smell of old paper was gone and had been replaced with the faint smell of rat urine.

He could hear Vernon laugh loudly, a muffled clinking of silverware on precious porcelain plates. They were having dinner; Harry's stomach cramped hungrily.

His fingers twitched as he trailed them over the worn vanes of the quill he had snuck into his trunk. It was old, fraying and broken on the very tip. Entirely useless.

"Incendio," Harry whispered. Nothing happened.

He leant forward slightly more, holding the quill closer to his face with more determination. "Incendio- *Incendio!"*

Harry snarled his nose angrily and threw the quill forcefully away. Instead, it fluttered disappointingly down to land with the softest of whispers. He couldn't even throw a proper tantrum.

Harry flopped backwards, hands rising to rub against his eyes. They burned, and for no comprehensible reason he felt a hoarse sob escape from his throat.

Knowing that the Dursley household could and most likely would, punish him further for interrupting dinner, he rolled and pressed his flat pillow against his mouth to muffle any cries.

Why was it fair, that they *hated* him for being a wizard?

'Skylar probably already knows how to do this.' That treacherous voice whispered in the silence. Harry felt a mess of anger and self-pity rise up, warring for control of his thoughts. He trembled in the dark, *'He's already so much better than I am.'*

He didn't know when he had fallen asleep or when he woke up the next day, he didn't bother actually getting up. He didn't actually have the space to anyway. The room was dark, and there was no difference between standing or lying when you couldn't see as well.

He didn't see the *point.*

The house was filled with muffled voices, some he didn't recognize and others he did. He heard Dudley leave, and his distinct voice wasn't heard again for some time. It must have been a weekday, Dudley leaving for school.

Time passed and Harry alternated between nearly screaming or collapsing motionlessly for hours on his cot.

Things didn't matter, while at the same time, *everything mattered.*

"It's not fair," Harry raged quietly, hands clawing in a repeated motion over and over on his exposed hipbones where his shirt rode up. The skin was red and irritated from his long untrimmed nails digging in.

"Why?" He cooed half calm and half hysterical.

'Magic is an extension of the soul,' Harry thought almost from an outwards perspective, *'The soul is derived of emotions. I have to mean it, to crave it,'*

Harry's head lolled to the side, piercing the dark with dulled green as he spotted the faint outline of the quill on the floor some distance away.

"I want it," Harry hissed, the words nearly distorting with how long he carried the vowels. His face twitched and he extended one hand towards the quill, a headache pounded against his skull and exhaustion weighed painfully on his bones.

"Incendio."

The quill burst into flames.

Indiscernible in the dark, Harry smiled.

Furtive

Chapter Summary

In which someone visits a zoo, meets a small snake, and catches on fire.

Chapter Notes

Here marks the most anticipated chapter of the reboot.
The introduction and the very different start of Lutain.

Thanks go to my beta, Chooser of the Slain, who made the progression of this chapter go very quickly.

The first plants started to sprout, heralding spring. The warmth was a welcome change from the numbing cold. The Dursleys went out and bought Dudley an entirely new wardrobe; he had somehow managed to outgrow all of his shorts over the winter.

Harry was now outside more often. There were weeds to be pulled and flowers to be tended to. He continued his manual labour with sharper glares and louder silence. He refused to speak, oftentimes not even responding to Petunia's hissed demands from the kitchen window. He had learned to nod after she spoke, better to avoid getting smacked by the broom once again.

(The broom had broken. Aunt Petunia was obviously startled and hadn't intended for it to leave such a large bruise on his back, yet didn't confess her guilt if it existed at all.)

His daily tasks consisted of working outside in the hotter months, occasionally taking quick drinks from the hose when nobody was watching. He planted the many flowers and shrubs Petunia purchased from the garden centre, digging holes and removing grubs when he found them.

Dudley would return home and casually smack him around, sometimes with friends if any accompanied him, and he would resume work until Petunia had scrounged dinner. Then he would be sent to his cupboard, occasionally being allowed to take a quick shower. The whole thing would repeat itself the next day when Dudley woke up.

It was busy work, physically demanding but it let him have plenty of time to think.

Harry *knew* that underage wizards weren't allowed to perform magic outside of a certified premise or outside of a proper estate. He knew for sure that he wasn't allowed to perform magic in front of muggles.

Looking around furtively, he set a sickly looking tulip aflame, sweating with the exertion.

He spent the rest of the day scanning the skies and the fence posts of Privet Drive, looking for the sure sign of a Ministry owl.

None showed up that day.

Or the day after.

Harry smiled grimly. He now knew he could perform magic, *without* the Ministry knowing.

Late February he thrust himself into studying the single aged tome he had secured a lifetime ago. He read and muttered and practiced quietly in the dark when he couldn't sleep, or when he was sent outside for hours alone.

Harry grinned breathlessly, twitching his hands and whispering under his breath in the middle of the day. Anthills smoldered and the small insects scattered. Dried and brown leaves from last autumn burnt the fastest. Anything green, he learned, smelt foul and only gave off loads of smoke.

The more he practiced, the easier it became to set things on fire.

Unlocking his cupboard, although he hadn't found an actual spell in his book for unlocking things, was easier now than it had been. Despite how horrible his living conditions were, and how he *loathed* the Dursley's, he was rather optimistic now.

(He still occasionally had days where he didn't bother crawling out of his cupboard; when he woke up still expecting to see Lily and James. He became better and better at just ignoring those thoughts.)

Easter Holiday changed it.

He was outside, weeding the garden with torn clothing that had once upon a time been his. They were now stained and worn far past the endurance of the charms placed on them. A particularly pesky weed had him grasping its thorny stalk, heaving backwards with both arms, using his weight as leverage.

Something grazed against his side and he scrambled to his feet. He blinked, dazed and confused, what had hit him? Was it a squirrel or a bird? Some other animal that had hit him before escaping without being seen?

His hands touched something wet and he inhaled shakily. Actually seeing the red against his skin triggered the overwhelming sensation of *pain.*

He choked down a scream, hands pressing through the tear in his shirt against the gash in his side. It was lazily dripping down his skin and staining the side of his shirt further.

Dudley gave some sort-of delayed cry of surprise. Harry spun, looking for his attacker only to see his baffled cousin and his friends. Dudley was holding an industrial slingshot Petunia had bought him last Christmas.

'What was-' His thinking broke once he saw what had hit him, a decent sized rock with a few sharp edges.

Dudley blinked slowly, lowering the slingshot before releasing a piercing wail which instantly led Harry to clench his teeth.

Petunia hurried out to see what was going on, wringing her hands and rushing to her son. Dudley cried out something else, pointing with pudgy fingers at Harry while his friends ran.

Petunia's face tightened as she looked at Harry sharply. Her expression was pinched as she stomped over the grass, grabbed his arm and tugged him towards the house. "Come on," She hissed out sharply, eying his side, "And no bleeding on the floor."

Harry's face twitched in annoyance, it wasn't like *she* had cleaned the floors.

She yanked him inside towards the kitchen, fetching the rag Harry used to polish the iron burners on the stove. It was already blackened with polish, replaceable in her eyes.

"Here," She grunted, snatching a series of rags in similar shape, band aids, and masking tape from nearby drawers, "Clean yourself up and *don't*," her eyes flashed, "touch *anything*."

Harry took the offered supplies sourly and locked the bathroom door behind him.

The gash wasn't large. It wasn't deep either, yet it seemed to continuously ooze out red like a wet sponge.

He shoved in the several rags, waiting until they had been soaked before taking them away. Everytime he tried, it would tear out the gooey clots just beginning to form, and start bleeding again.

Finally he settled with pushing in one rag, clenching his jaw against the searing throb, and using the masking tape around his waist to hold it in place. It held, he returned the unused rags, and was sent to his cupboard.

" *Sanatas.* " Harry hissed, flushing angrily when nothing happened.

"*Sanatas!*" He tried again, more insistently this time**,** his voice wavering in his frustration. The crippling sensation of doubt started to worm its way through his forced bravado. "*Sanatas!*"

The skin around ugly black scab on his side itched and tingled uncomfortably. Harry groaned softly, smacking his fist against the small cot next to him in frustration.

What was he doing *wrong?* He'd done exactly what it said in the book, even checked his pronunciation multiple times just to make sure. The scrape refused to heal like Harry wanted.

Instead it just tingled and itched never letting him forget about his injury. It was possible the constant buzzing of pain was clouding his ability to focus his magic.

Dudley was back in school, a true blessing considering for the first while only twisting a specific way would crack the scabs and cause the bleeding to start again. It had oozed a foul-smelling pus, to the point where Aunt Petunia had thrown a small tube of paste at him, ordering him to deal with it.

Now, it was a thick heavy scab with bumps and ridges on its surface.

" *Sanatas.* " Harry tried again, swallowing and trying to direct the flow of something he couldn't see into his side.

In a moment of blind panic, Harry wondered if maybe his magic was gone, if maybe this was why people didn't use wandless magic. He cried out, then instantly realised his mistake and covered his mouth.

The damage was done, he heard the shuffle of movement above him and then the loud thudding sound of footsteps thundering down the landing towards the stairs. Uncle Vernon was awake. Harry's eyes widened in horror of the consequences, and he scrambled backwards on his cot, yanking his shirt down to try and hide what he'd been doing.

Vernon threw the door open. *"What* are you *screaming* about!" he thundered, his beedy little eyes glittering malevolently in the dark. "We have had *enough* of your racket!"

Harry tried to shuffle further back, tried to escape Uncle Vernon's reach. The obese man grabbed his ankle and forcefully pulled him from the cupboard under the stairs. Harry bit his tongue to crying out in pain as his shirt rubbed against the sensitive skin.

Vernon, not noticing or, more likely, not caring, *yanked.*

Harry scrambled with his hands to find something -- anything -- to grab hold of as he was bodily dragged out. Already his leg hurt from the intense pressure and blood was pounding in his head.

Vernon stomped through the kitchen and wrenched open the backdoor, dragging Harry along behind him. Still grunting something about how Harry wouldn't make any sort of distracting noise

in his home, Vernon threw the small boy out.

Privet Drive was dark and cool at night. The cool night air felt almost soothing to the scrape which had, once again, cracked open. Harry could already imagine the bruises forming where Vernon had grabbed him.

Vernon had kicked him out, Harry thought in a dazed haze of disbelief. His uncle had *actually* kicked him out.

Harry was filled with the sudden, overpowering desire to run, to disappear into the dark and leave behind the Dursleys'... and leave behind *everything.*

But then Lily won't know where you went, a quiet voice whispered in the back of his mind.

Harry hugged his knees and tried to calm his breath so he didn't break down into sobs. He wanted to run away, but there was obviously some small part of him that still wanted his parents to come and rescue him.

He didn't know what to do.

Summer eventually took spring's place, schools were let out, and Harry was bombarded daily with rocks, insults, and the occasional water balloon. His cousin had learned nothing, though Harry wasn't sure what he'd actually expected.

It was manageable. He stuck to the shadows of the house and only interacted with the Dursleys when he absolutely had to. Often times he could get by without saying anything the entire day--nobody actually initiated conversation. He began to wonder what a genuine conversation was like, he couldn't remember.

The oppressive dry heat of June officially ruined the last clean clothes Harry had brought with him. Sweat and dirt had stained his clothes and left a permanent smell that wouldn't come out no matter how many times he washed them. It was only a matter of time until Aunt Petunia threw them out.

June 23, Harry was released from his hard cupboard only to weave through the mound of wrapped

boxes and gifts in the living room.

37 presents, which was one less than last year, apparently. Dudley had shouted and started throwing a temper tantrum. Watching the obese boy shed crocodile tears, Harry felt sickened. The presents filled the room and left little space to walk. His parents soon managed to placate their screaming son by promising to get him two more on the day's outing.

Which Harry was *forced* to come along on.

(More realistically though, the Dursleys didn't trust him enough to leave him home alone. Petunia had started to have suspicions that Harry could escape from his cupboard.)

This left him following quietly along to the zoo.

Harry trailed behind the Dursleys, trying to stay as inconspicuous as possible.

He didn't particularly want to be associated with them, obnoxious-looking tourists even in their own country, but he knew that running off or disappearing on his own wouldn't end well for him later.

The muggle zoo was fascinating. Harry hadn't the opportunity to visit any sort of animal habitats since the dreaded and eventful night a year ago. Since then even the thought of seeing a collection of animals left him with a loud frantic pulse and a nauseating dizziness. Regardless, he couldn't find it in himself to admit that the assortment of fur and feathers interested him more than most everything.

Seeing real tigers without fangs or African gazelles lacking spines and extra horns was a surreal experience. Although most were lethargic in the midday heat, they each possessed a sort of mesmerizing beauty other people didn't seem to recognize.

He felt a deep seated fury bubbling up inside as Dudley and his friends continued to ponder the activity of hurling empty beverage containers or small rocks into the enclosures. His fingers clenched and unclenched when one boy actually hurled himself against the glass and thoroughly terrified one sleeping sea-lion.

The next step on the zoo tour was to visit the large imposing facility on the far side. It was embellished with decorative artificial jungle vines and large sandy boulders. The letters had been painted on in bright green: Reptile Den.

Entering the Reptile Den, Harry once more felt his heartbeat quicken. The air smelled stale in here, the humidity and filtered air of a carefully controlled climate. He stood in the middle of the hallways to avoid being too close to the lizards and staring crocodiles. The tank to his right featured an abnormally large turtle and a few dozen small fish.

He flinched when Dudley this time complained loudly and rudely about the waste of space each lizard was, evidently due to their inactivity. His voice bounced and distorted off the glass walls of the many tanks.

Harry twitched, already uncomfortable and tense from his rising anxiety and loathing for the blatant mistreatment his cousin displayed towards the creatures.

"Make it move!" Dudley complained loudly. He watched approvingly as Uncle Vernon huffed and rapped his cane sharply against the glass. The python behind the glass jolted back, eyes narrowing as it started to shake alarmed and confused.

Harry *hated* this. How could anyone care so little for a living thing?

Dudley cheered once a particularly loud whack stirred the snake into hissing and rearing. The action was entirely defensive, its tail whipped around wildly as its coils tightened protectively.

"Blasted thing," Vernon grunted, mustache twitching as the snake hid its head, "better use as a pair of shoes if I say so myself."

Harry's eyes widened. He shifted a little to watch the snake around his uncles girth. One of Dudley's friends, having been watching the crocodiles raced over to view the now active snake.

"Move it, freak!" Piers shouted, elbowing sharply into Harry's side and knocking him to the floor. He landed on sore elbows below a hot sandy showcase.

Pierce raced around Vernon before he clapped both hands harshly against the glass. It echoed, making the snake violently flinch and move for any sort of exit.

"Look at it *squirm!* " Piers laughed, clapping the glass again, "The ones at home don't squirm like that, do they Dudley?"

Harry grit his teeth and before his eyes, quite magically in fact, the boy leant forward and *fell* into the habitat.

Harry stared as Piers screamed, scrambling backwards as the mighty python rushed to freedom. Dudley screamed, jumping back against the wall as the snake hissed loudly.

Vernon belted something ugly while Aunt Petunia shrieked, clutching her purse to her chest.

" *Oh, deserved."* Harry heard, a snickering sound in a dialect just slightly off from English.

The python hurried, weaving between the concrete benches and decorative fake plants towards the exit, it hissed out a muffled yet distinct cry of " *Goodbye* !"

Harry watched the snake with a small smile, it seemed that the python triggered a chain reaction. Reptiles and similar snakes rose and jumped to attention. The reptile house was filled with the growing crescendo of rattlers and hisses and whispering voices.

Dudley and his friends ran, screaming at the glass enclosures which miraculously remained in tact. Vernon grabbed his wife and fled, with a muffled cry of, "no more of this freakish nonsense!"

Harry was left alone, in the growing din whispers while a few rattlesnakes prodded their glass walls curiously.

"Not open?" One whispered, muffled through the glass.

A coiled pit viper cackled something happily and danced on its synthetic plants. A large cobra flared it's hood and rambled out a series of words conveying its frustration.

"Not free? No sad, still funny." The voice behind him hissed again, humor in its tone. *"Thank, magic hatchling."*

"What?" Harry blurted, blinking and not feeling the specific accent that he'd had before. *"What?"* He repeated.

The snake pulled back, flickering it's tongue timidly " *you speak?"*

"Er, hello? " Harry offered, spotting it's dark scales and bright slit eyes, " *How do you know it was me?"*

The snake wavered, unsure yet interested. *"You stay. They flee."* The snake pulled out further and raised itself. It wasn't very big. " *You magic, make things* ."

Harry nodded slightly. *"I have magic. But most people don't know about it. How do you know?"*

The snake paused, stiffening as if it was trying to comprehend the words, " *I den with magic. Make prey make happy."*

Harry frowned, " *you were born with magic* ?" He struggled, not used to extended verbal interaction.

The snake slid further out onto a sandy rock, it looked at Harry enthusiastically, *"den-mates magic. Humans, make prey."*

Harry smiled a fraction and touched the glass, looking at the creature with slight awe . *"I don't live with people that have magic. My family does-- I mean did. I don't live with them anymore."* Harry swallowed, *"They're gone because it's not safe. But I don't think I'm safe here either."*

"Hatchlings left. Den-mates left, alone too. " The snake offered, ducking its head slowly, *"Alone in box."*

Harry frowned at the snake, " *you lived with wizards? Was it dangerous?"*

" *No bite! No human prey* ." The snake flicked it's tongue wildly, " *some human nice. Some cruel."*

Harry nodded slowly, *"some humans are cruel too. And some try but they just-* " Harry ignored the lump in his throat " *sometimes they have to leave you . Sometimes they don't care and sometimes they forget.* "

"Magic human sad."

"No, no I'm not--"

"Sad too." It quietly added.

Its scales were very small. A mixture of dark brown or black, its eyes were alert.

"Harry, " the boy offered, " *my name is Harry."*

The snake flicked it's tongue, " *magic child Harry. Den-mate Harry?* " It mused, voice wavering with as much hope and hesitant longing as it could disguise.

"I- " Harry stumbled, shifting backwards and looking towards the entrance to the reptile house, " *I can't-"*

"Oh, " it stated quietly, shifting down and curling around tightly. The action revealed just how small the snake really was, " *I okay. Stay in box.* " It soothed.

Harry looked at it, wavering and watching as it crumpled into something mournfully sad. *"I'm sorry."*

"No. No sorry. " The snake argued, " *expected. No sorry. I have box."*

Harry winced slightly and the snake seemed determined now to prove him wrong.

"Look, I-"

"I have box. Heat and cold prey sometimes. Space!" It urged, thrashing out its tail, narrowly avoiding the walls.

Harry swallowed and touched the glass once again. He was only partly speaking to the little snake now. *"You're the first thing interested in talking to me. Normally it's my brother. Normally I'm the one saying it's okay...* "

'But is it really?' That doubting little voice asked. *'Has it ever been okay?'*

Harry's eyes narrowed and his hand curled into a sudden fist, heart hardening in resolve. "It doesn't *matter* because they don't *care* ."

He eyed the snake through the glass, suddenly relaxing. He felt a sudden longing that was easy to place. He had something in common with this little snake. They'd both been abandoned by their families, cast aside like they were worthless.

Harry's insides twisted and he wasn't sure what exactly he was feeling.

He reached through the glass with the sensation of breaching water. The snake hissed in surprise, not opposing how gently Harry hoisted the serpent into the air. It wrapped its body around Harry's hand, coiling between his fingers for a more secure hold.

It twitched once traveling through the glass, tail thrashing in excitement as it flicked it's tongue quickly.

"You won't bite me, right ?" Harry asked cautiously, lifting the eighteen inch snake closer to his face.

"No bite ." The snake assured, " *you help now I help.* "

" *Help?"* Harry echoed. Already he felt lighter. He'd found a kindred spirit. Someone who *understood.*

"Help, " the snake confirmed firmly. *"I help Harry."*

Harry felt a genuine smile spread across his face. The glossy dark scales reflected the dim overhead lights.

"Are you dangerous?" Harry asked, rising from his knees and brushing off dirt with his unoccupied hand.

"Yes! Nasty bite! Humans careful. No bite humans unless Harry say bite," the snake offered. It sounded quite hopeful and seemed pleased with itself when Harry nodded.

"You have to stay quiet and you can't move, " Harry explained carefully, *"I can't have Petunia,Vernon, or Dudley know about you."*

The snake stared and flicked it's tongue.

" *Can you hide* ? *Will you be cold?* " Harry asked, growing worried with how he was going to smuggle out a snake.

"Winter. " It stated simply and slowly started to climb up Harry's arm under his shirt and summer jacket. Harry flinched at the foreign touch, the snake seemed to slip a few times but after a few careful undulations it managed to nestle wrapped around his underarm and the top of his shoulder.

Harry stood wobbly and walked, carefully feeling for if the snake slid. It held, and Harry slid out of the exit doors, just as a group of zookeepers hurried by with special equipment that Harry guessed might be used to catch the runaway python **.**

Finding the Dursleys and friends were easy afterwards. Petunia was watching a zookeeper with hawk-like scrutiny. The zookeeper had been kneeling, talking to Dudley and his friends at eye level. Harry slipped around quietly and stood behind his uncle.

"-bout that? You can pick anything from the giftshop," Harry overheard the stressing zookeeper. He confirmed to the sniffing Dudley. The zookeeper rose, looking very apologetic. "I'm very sorry sir, I don't know how the enclosure was not secure."

Vernon sniffed and clicked his cane on the ground loudly, "you lot are lucky that *ruddy cretin* didn't bite my boy!" He thundered, pointing his cane at the quickly floundering zookeeper. "Sue! Sue we will! This bloody establishment should be shut down and all of those brutish creatures be put down!"

The zookeeper's expression quickly transformed into something of annoyance and masked irritation. When he spoke, his tone was clipped. "Sir. I am sorry that your experience was less than *pleasant.* Countless other guests have enjoyed our reptile exhibits and the various rare and endangered species on display--"

"Oh they better be endangered! I'd have them gone! Good to see others haven't lost their minds!" Vernon fumed, turning sharply and stomping loudly. "-and *you!* " Vernon fumed, finally having noticed Harry.

Petunia's eyes widened and she gave a little gasp. Harry shifted uncertain as her expression twisted into something ugly.

"Vernon." She crisply stated, grasping his arm sharply, "let's *go* ."

Harry fidgeted.

Harry managed to drop the snake outside when fake falling out of the car. The snake, confused but obliging, slid under the car and hid.

Vernon was furious, grabbing Harry's shirt by the back collar, all but dragging him inside the house. Harry felt a jab of irritation, morbidly wondering how long he would be trapped in his cupboard this time, or how else he would be punished.

Once Piers and the rest of Dudley's friends left, Petunia and Vernon began to scream. Each voice adding to the chaotic cacophony once they had clued in that the python was his doing.

Harry stared at the center of the kitchen table. He was tempted to set it ablaze.

"Are you listening, boy!" Vernon roared, reaching out to smack Harry on the back of his head. Having not anticipated it, Harry lurched forward and bumped his forehead on the table.

"Vernon!" Petunia shrieked, taken aback by the sudden violence.

Harry lifted his head from the table, one hand drifting to his forehead to feel the skin tenderly.

Vernon spluttered, obviously surprised himself. Harry turned, eyes blank as he slowly looked at Vernon.

Vernon's clothes burst into flames.

It wasn't severe, nothing dangerous but it was a split second of *heat*-- hungry tendrils licking from his shoulders and burning the tips of his mustache.

Petunia screamed, grabbing the tablecloth and tearing it away. A vase of daisies on the table shattered on the floor and she hurriedly used the cloth to pat out the flames.

Vernon spun, looking horrified at Harry. He couldn't manage a single word, instead gasping out noises of confusion and anger.

And perhaps fear?

Harry slid off the chair, one hand flitting to his forehead where a bump was forming. He walked, creating dead silence with each step, and closed the door to his cupboard behind him.

Three more locks were installed that night.

Harry unlocked them all.

Feud

Chapter Summary

In which Harry is prone to fiery outbursts and a little girl named Suzie fails to be quiet.

Chapter Notes

Once again, shoutout to my absolutely amazing beta who has helped make this story something to be proud of.

"What's your name?" Harry asked, peering down at the small snake which coiled around his wrist.

"Name?" It questioned, flicking its tongue curiously. *"No name, Den-Harry."*

They were hidden away in a park just down the road from the Dursleys'. Harry had created a soft glow with no real source, just enough for him to see by really. The subtle warmth of magic thrummed under his skin, feeling almost tangible. Harry had forgotten the multiple times since his outburst, that his blood was only deep red and not illuminated by the magic pulsating with each heartbeat. He had plenty of opportunities to try and remember this fact, Dudley and his friends were almost obsessive with maiming him whenever possible now.

"Just Harry," he corrected, using one hand to pet the sleek back of the snake. **H (** e enjoyed the feeling of its scales; he'd expected the snake to feel slimy, but it was smooth and dry. Its scales were a dark brown, almost black, but they had a faint, splotchy pattern: dirt stained, like Harry's own fingers.

"I could name you, if you'd like?"

"*Den-Harry, yes.*" It flicked its tongue, catching itself quickly. "*No Den-Harry, Harry?*"

Harry nodded his head, before realising that the small snake probably didn't understand human body language enough to know what a nod *meant* . They had totally different bodies after all, Harry and his little friend. " *That's right. I am Harry.* "

“I am?” It asked, its voice rising at the end to indicate a question.

At first, he’d thought talking to a snake would be just like talking to another person, only with foreign-sounding hissing, which, to Harry, sounded just like English anyway. The little snake didn’t understand the majority of the bigger words though, some of the bigger concepts. Its vocabulary was very limited. It made talking with it a challenge, but an interesting challenge.

Realising that his little friend was asking for its name, Harry tilted his head, looking at the serpent curiously. “*I’m reading a book, the creator of this spell is Nikkoli Lutain. I don’t know what it does. But the name sounds interesting.*”

“ *Lutain?* ” The little snake asked, pausing in what seemed like concentration, “ *I...am?* ”

Harry nodded, then, remembering himself, he smiled. “ *You’re Lutain.* ”

The snake looked as confused as Harry thought a snake might look. “*You’re Lutain?*”

Was it the contractions that the little snake didn’t understand? He thought about it for a moment, then realised that the problem might’ve been one of perspective.

“*Okay, I am Harry. You are Lutain. In your eyes, I am Lutain, you are Harry,*” Harry said, gesturing with his hands, before realising again that, since snakes didn’t have hands, his gesturing might not mean anything to the little snake.

It seemed to understand despite the language gap. “*I am Lutain! You are Harry! You are Harry no prey!*”

“ *Not prey,* ” Harry agreed.

“You are Harry,” It hissed gleefully, *“You are not prey.”*

“What Harry prey?” Lutain asked one day, curling around a flower pot while Harry pruned

carnations by the side garden.

“What is Harry’s prey.” Harry corrected instantly, not looking up from where he tugged at a few browning stalks. They’d been working on overcoming the language gap between them.

“What is Harry’s prey?” Lutain repeated, flicking its tongue.

“Well,” Harry started. *“I am human. I eat many things, sometimes I can eat certain plants or fruits. I can eat meat, but we eat larger animals like pigs and cows.”*

“Plants?” Lutain seemed baffled, *“Human prey plants?”*

Harry plucked off a dandelion that was trying to grow up through the ground. He held it up for Lutain to see, then stuffed it in his mouth.

Lutain reared back, hissing in disgust, *“Not plant! Not want!”*

Harry smiled. *“Plants we eat are called vegetables.”*

“Vegetables, not want,” Lutain rephrased firmly. *“Vegetables, I not want.”*

“I do not want.” Harry corrected.

Lutain slid forward, flicking its tongue against the dandelion stump where some sap was beading. *“I...I do not want vegetables.”*

Harry smiled. He reached down, holding his out hand and Lutain wriggled against it, pleased. For the first time in a long while, Harry chuckled.

“When do Harry shed?” Lutain asked quietly, peering at Harry’s skin curiously. Harry paused, looking over his shoulder where Lutain coiled on his cot. He had smuggled the snake inside earlier that day; it was supposed to rain that night.

“Humans have skin. Snakes have scales.” Harry explained, finding a shirt to change into, *“Humans heal their skin over time.”*

“No shed mark?” Lutain tasted the air with its tongue, then moved its head closer to something on Harry’s body. Its tongue flickered out again, tickling his side.

Harry peered down at his body and saw the thin scar along his side from where Dudley had grazed him with his slingshot. It was an angry red still.

“No, the mark may fade. Some scars do. Some scars never will,” Harry offered, brushing his fingertips over the raised skin.

“Humans skin no want. Humans skin hurt.”

Harry hummed in agreement, pulling on his shirt and moving to sit on the bed next to the snake, *“You know, I never asked what gender you are.”*

“Gender?” Lutain asked curiously.

Harry thought for a moment. *“Eggs? Do you lay eggs?”*

“No eggs! Lutain no eggs.” Lutain hissed.

“*If you don't have eggs, you’re male. If you do, you’re female,*” Harry explained, reaching for the one well-loved spell book, *“I am male. You are male. Male and Female are genders.”*

Lutain nodded as if understanding, peering curiously as Harry pulled up the book and opened it to a specific page, a certain spell he had been working on. “ *This is a book of spells.* ”

“ *Book?* ”

“ *Talking, each marking is a letter and letters together makes a word. You can look at the letters and understand what someone says.* ”

The little snake’s tongue flickered and it brought its head closer to the old pages. There was, of course, no way for it to actually know how to read; it had no idea at all what each of the words said, or even what sounds were represented by which squiggles on the page.

Harry didn’t mind, in fact he enjoyed the conversation. He wasn’t quite as lonely anymore, now that he had someone to talk to.

It was when Dudley blamed an injury on Harry, that his living arrangements once again changed. Brookdale Residency was a large white building on the outskirts of anywhere. It was just miles of countryside in every direction, bordered only by a small copse of trees on the furthest south side. The building had large windows shrouded by dull blue curtains. There was a porch swing by the front doorstep.

“Here we are!” Vernon thundered, seeming quite pleased as he heaved up the steps using his cane. He rapped his cane against one of the decorative white pillars under the overhang. “Wonderful establishment, this one here!”

“*Where are we?*” Lutain hissed quietly, from just under Harry’s shirt around his left shoulder. Harry didn’t dare answer his little friend.

A tall, thin woman stepped out. She was taller than Aunt Petunia and wearing shoes which gave her a few extra inches. She peered down at Harry and Uncle Vernon with an imperious **,** pinched expression.

“Leave the trunk here,” she ordered, nodding to the porch. Her voice was a sharp, no-nonsense kind of voice. “I’ll have one of the workers carry it inside.”

“Excellent!” Vernon blustered, wheezing and leaning on his cane. “So, you...” He motioned

between Harry and the woman. He wouldn't meet Harry's eyes. "Yes."

Turning quickly and lifting one hand in a half-hearted and entirely insincere wave, Vernon hurried back towards the car without ever looking back.

The woman crossed her arms, looking down at Harry with a scowl. The sound of Vernon's car tearing away, leaving Harry behind with this complete stranger was background noise to what she said next. "Brookdale Residency is an orphanage. It's where children who have no family, or family that don't want them, end up."

Harry twitched slightly.

"Some children are troublemakers, some aren't. You aren't going to be one, are you?" she sniffed, her every word dripping disdain.

Lutain stiffened and the low gatherings of a hiss seemed to bristle.

"No," said Harry, his tone mirroring hers. The woman didn't seem surprised.

"I am Madam Clover. You will address me as such and obey all rules. Do we have an agreement?" The woman said sternly. It was clearly not a question.

"*Master, I do not like human,*" Lutain whispered, voice dangerously cold, "*I do not like her much.*"

"We do." Harry confirmed, shifting his arm enough to move Lutain slightly.

"Good." She turned on her heels and walked back into the building.

"*Harry want Lutain to bite?*" Lutain offered.

" *No,* " Harry murmured under his breath. *"We'll just have to make do.* "

Harry's room was nestled on the left side of the hallway, four doors down from the stairs. The room was square, in drastic need of a renovation, and had a larger cot with stained sheets. It was already much better than the cupboard.

The company was at times questionably better, and worse. Brookdale Residency was large and mostly empty, because of this each child was gifted an individual room. A bathroom was shared between each neighbouring door, connecting each room to the other. Each room was old, creaking floorboards and broken window ledges. The walls were an off-colour white, the lights were a buzzing fluorescent that made each vein and artery pop just a little more under the skin.

Harry's trunk sat at the foot of his bed. Although his room came equipped with a wardrobe, he kept all of his belongings in the trunk, with the exception of a few supplied toiletries. He noticed almost instantly that his trunk had shown signs of tampering and his toiletries had been swapped with mud paste.

There were two children in particular who seemed to have a grudge against Harry more than others: David Forestar and Ralph Lingburg.

Harry didn't know the exact details or their story, but he didn't care enough to actually learn it either. Both boys had apparently been left at the orphanage at an early age.

Left to his own devices, Ralph wasn't generally motivated enough to get into much trouble. David was another matter. David had no qualms about attacking or stealing from the younger children. It was when they were together that things got really out of hand.

Both boys were eleven years old and already they were a force to be reckoned with in the small world that encompassed the orphanage. They'd somehow managed to convince the otherwise strict Madam Clover to overlook any incidents when they were unfortunate enough to be caught in compromising situations.

The boys were fascinated with Harry, or rather his apathetic views that were so different from the shriveling mess that most children became. They wanted to get a rise out of him. They broke into his room often, he could tell. They were the ones who had most likely had tampered with and tried to break into his trunk.

Then one day, Harry was at the top of the stairs, intent on going outside for a bit of fresh air and to let Lutain try his best at snatching a mouse in the neighbouring fields, when Suzie Forestar, David's younger sister, appeared.

Suzie, short for Suzanna, was relatively harmless. She was seven, having just had her birthday a week earlier. Most of the time she was a sweet, naive little girl, but sometimes… sometimes she was a biting gossip who liked nothing more than insulting other people.

That was the mood she was in now.

"Harry!" She snapped out, batting her eyelashes and giving him a large, devious smile. She quickly got in between him and the stairs.

"Care to move? I'm going outside."

"*Are* you?" She gasped, hands dramatically covering her cheeks, eyes widening in a mock caricature of real surprise. "Is that what you said to your parents?"

Harry stopped. "What?"

Suzie's grin widened; normally Harry ignored everything she said. Not this time. He'd taken the bait, he realised a moment too late.

"Or maybe… Maybe your parents just *left* you!" Suzie accused, with an over-exaggerated sense of false shock. Harry flinched. Suzie nearly squealed, realising that she'd struck a nerve. "Maybe they realised just how freaky you are! Maybe they *never* loved you at all!"

Harry saw red. Because it was nothing he hadn't thought to himself, during the long, dark nights in the cupboard under the stairs. His jaw clenched and for a brief moment, all he wanted was for her to take that back, for her to *pay* .

There was a rush in his ears, a pounding, painful pressure, and his jaw tightened again as she giggled victoriously over his hidden hurt--

And then she was screaming, her arms flailing wildly for something to grab onto as she slipped and fell backwards down the stairs. He watched in shock as the little girl tumbled end over end painfully down the stairs, until she came to rest at the bottom. She started wailing in pain and screaming for help.

Harry heard the hurried footsteps of the adults and likely Madam Clover, rushing from the lower level.

Harry quickly hurried away, one hand sliding into his pocket to wake Lutain and shush him as he headed back to his room and locked the door, his heart pounding like a drum in his chest.

The incident report for the file had been filled out by suppertime that night. Harry knew that he wasn't officially mentioned in the documentation. If he was, or if he'd been suspected, they would have sent him to be questioned in Madam Clover's office.

Unfortunately, one of Suzie's more impressive skills was spreading rumours quickly and efficiently. By suppertime that night, everyone knew. He wasn't a fool and it was impossible not to notice that the table he was sitting at was completely empty, while children were practically sitting on each other's laps at the other tables. They kept throwing him looks, somewhere between glares and anxious peeking. Their quiet whispering filled the room with hushed and hissed conversation which left Harry feeling isolated.

The worst happened when David stormed over, grabbed Harry's plate of food, and dumped it all over his hair.

Harry felt a flash of anger. Instantly, David leapt back with a cry of surprise and pain. One hand quickly clapped onto his other wrist, where the fading imprint of a red ring was starting to form around his arm.

The next day, they learned that David had somehow developed first degree burns on his left wrist after coming into contact with hot metal. That was the official story anyway, but everyone knew what really happened.

Harry just kept Lutain with him more, now that even the other orphans wanted him to be alone.

Dire

Chapter Summary

> Where David takes it too far, strange men visit, and trauma is best inflicted while young

Chapter Notes

> It seems that I accidentally posted the wrong chapter.
> I have fixed it- although regret my mistake earlier.

“This is cold rain.”

“It’s snow actually. It’s called snow when it’s white and fluffy like this. It’s frozen rain.”

Lutain poked his head out of Harry’s coat, his small tongue flickering just under Harry’s jaw.
“Snew?”

“Snow.” Harry corrected, teaching Lutain yet another word. Lutain had been a very fast learner **--** actually suspiciously fast. If it wasn’t for the fact that Harry was almost certain that Lutain *wasn’t* a magical species, he would have suspected Lutain had been charmed.

Lutain had grown marginally longer. He had always been of decent length, now he was nearing two feet, which wasn’t at all spectacular in the serpent world. He had thickened, something he boasted proudly over since he could now consume large mice.

Winter had come quickly, snow falling just after the end of October and carrying with it the biting chill everyone seemed to hate. The orphanage was not at all insulated against the cold and everyone became as frosty inside as it was outside. Madam Clover was more snappish, David more ruthless, and other children more avoidant. The entire building seemed to whisper of all the strange occurrences, rumors about Harry, ranging from being possessed by demonic beings to the offspring of a cult leader were widespread.

Harry learned that nobody could be trusted and everyone wanted something from you.

(Lutain was the one to point out that by making yourself necessary for everyone else, it secured your position as irreplaceable.)

Harry didn't have warm clothing; he had only what was brought to him. Of course, families donated clothing or money to the orphanage, but that money and the donations went to the other children first, because Harry had the misfortune of Madam Clover's frustration and annoyance.

Not that she could ever actually pin anything on him.

Harry stiffened when he was hit in the back by something cold and wet. Pausing, he could hear the snickers of David and Ralph, boasting likely to the younger children about how great their aim was. Harry heard someone, practically an infant, laugh gleefully as David hit Harry once again.

"Flea-coated rodents." Lutain grumbled, nestling further into Harry's coat to avoid the freezing cold of the melting snow. Harry twitched as a single trail of water slid down under his threadbare jacket and touched his spine.

"What's wrong, little Harry?" David laughed, sauntering over in a jacket not looking that much better, tossing a baseball-sized wad of snow in one hand to the other, "Don't like the cold?"

David snaked his left foot out to whack into Harry's foot. Ralph, having snuck up behind Harry, ran forward to knock into his shoulders. Not anticipating the tag team, Harry's arm windmilled as he yelped and crashed face first into the thin layered snow.

David laughed, posing something which made more of the newcomers laugh wildly.

Harry winced and glared at David who looked suddenly more interested.

"What was that?" David gasped, squatting to try and listen, "Are you trying to say something to *me?"* He clapped loudly, "Well done! I thought you were mute!"

"I don't have anything to say to someone with your intelligence." Harry grumbled, propping himself upright on his elbows.

David frowned, and promptly knocked Harry's face back into the snow.

“Aw, don’t be like that little Harry,” His eyes sparkled in amusement, “Are you giving me the *cold shoulder?* ”

“Bite me.” Harry hissed out, causing David to frown.

“You’re lucky it’s winter,” David casually mentioned, “If you said that in summer, I bet I could get Clover to think that was a threat against me, with that weird snake that you had.” David sniffed, “Creepy thing, I hope it froze.”

“Snakes hibernate,” Harry dryly pointed out, “I don’t think you could convince her that I can suddenly talk to snakes.”

“Oh I don’t know.” David shrugged, his gaze suddenly very intense, “People think a lot of things about you. Supernatural things,” his lip twitched, “That you can move things without touching them, or I don’t know, *push* my *sister* down a flight of stairs.”

David looked much too friendly for the conversation to actually be that.

“So!” David chirped, “I just have to protect the rest of all of us from your weirdness and make sure you don’t go around messing with *my sister.”*

“Don’t play with fire, David,” Harry warned, “You’ll get *burned.”*

David’s expression fell somewhat dark, his one hand moved instinctively to the faint burn scar around his wrist.

“You’ll pay for that, Harry.”

“You’re the one who kisses up to Clover. You have more money than I do.” David’s nostrils flared and he looked up at Ralph who was waiting for some unagreed signal. He seemed at a loss. “Why don’t you just leave me alone for once? You don’t want to start something you can’t stop.”

“Oh shut *up.”* David howled, punching downwards messily.

Although the strike was sloppy, Harry was on the ground and didn’t have any chance of avoiding it. He tucked his chin down, taking the hit on the back of his head and feeling it recoil through his

neck and shoulders. Ralph jumped in, giving a mighty kick which let the air leave Harry's lungs in a mighty poof.

Lutain hissed something alarmed and frantic as he tried to wriggle free through the blows. Harry's ducked head wouldn't let the snake wiggle through.

"Master!" Lutain shrieked, whipping his tail angrily and panicked.

Ralph managed a kick which somehow knicked the lower half of Lutain's tail. Lutain cried in pain, curling up and shaking under the coat.

'Leave Lutain alone!' Harry thought vehemently, bubbling anger pooling over as he glared through his messy fringe at David, *'Leave us alone!'*

David pulled back his leg to kick before he toppled and *fell.* His leg sunk through the snowbank, stopping just above his knee. The only strange factor, was that his other leg had found sturdy ground just an inch through the snow.

David had sunk *into* the ground.

David screamed in surprise and fear, staring at his leg dumbly for a few moments before hollering for Clover and screaming about witchcraft, which Harry found quite amusing.

Harry straightened, getting off the ground and wiping his nose with the back of his hand. His nose had started trickling a thin stream, not that anyone was looking at him. Even Ralph had stumbled back, skittering off for safety.

"What did I tell you," Harry sighed, still highly irritated.

Lutain moaned something quietly, whispering in agony and trembling against Harry's body.

Why was it that *Lutain* had to be hurt, he hadn't done a thing. It wasn't fair, it wasn't justified for an innocent to be hurt. David should be the one wounded, *he* had at least been the attacker.

Harry wanted David to *hurt.*

"When you poke the fire, you get *burned."* Harry hissed out, reaching out and snatching David's hand between his own. He heard the loud hissing crackle without actually feeling anything. The air was filled with an acrid stench of something cooking.

David screamed. Tears overflowed his glassy eyes as he flailed, trying to break free although he couldn't with one leg burrowed in the frozen ground.

Harry let go sharply, taking a step back. David's hand smoldered, the skin peeling and shriveling away from his hand like a timelapse video. It smoked and smelled of something rank, looking putrid dark red and swelling already.

"I'll get Madam Clover," Harry drawled, swallowing against the small sensation of guilt that was rising in his throat, "I'll tell her you were trying to play with firecrackers."

David said nothing, sniffling, staring at his hand in horror and excruciating pain.

Harry turned and walked quickly towards the house, already dreading the accusations and the future whispers that would spread about him.

He doubted David would ever bother him again.

David's hand scarred, a permanent reminder Harry thought. It was a mottled patchwork of dark red and pale pink that would never be smooth again. David hid the ghastly-looking scarring with an old ratty black glove and he was lucky it was his left hand and not the right. Harry had heard that the nerves had been damaged and that David had nearly no fine motor control left in the stiffened fingers and taut skin.

After that, the other children avoided him. The rooms around his were quickly vacated, until Harry was then surrounded by empty rooms. The orphanage staff couldn't actually prove anything, but it was likely a security precaution. He had been involved in both incidents, after all.

The other children avoided him like the plague whenever he went outside. They lapsed into silence when he walked past, often times retreating entirely into their rooms.

At dinner, nobody talked when he was in the vicinity.

He stopped having dinner at the same time as everyone else.

They didn't deserve his company anyways.

Christmas was a miserable holiday.

The other children laughed and played with the cheap toys they mysteriously were given, boasting and fighting for the best one.

Suzie picked up her teddy bear and, against the hushed and insistent advice given to her, she turned and pointedly looked at Harry. "Oh, looks like nobody likes you enough to give *you* a present!"

Harry made sure she woke up to burned cloth and ashes for button eyes.

Harry felt a wave of despair hit him the moment the snow began to melt.

Some small part of Harry had been hoping, that perhaps Vernon Dursley would return and take him back. Or even his parents. Harry hoped that they would at least check in on him, then, finding him no longer at the Dursleys', that they would come to take him home.

But it had been over a year and a half.

Lutain had gone silent, his damaged scales still remaining with a slight kink near the tip of his tail. The snake was now Harry's only decent conversation and rather skilled at it with Harry's constant

teachings.

“They’re not coming back, are they Lutain?” Harry asked, idly watching the melting snow.

The snake tightened around his wrist for a brief second, but never spoke.

The days were warmer. Behind him he heard the quiet chorus of young children shouting and playing. A slight breeze tugged at the dead grass and new tufts of spring foliage.

Harry closed his eyes. Like the spring breeze, he left himself relax. And he let himself go.

“*They’re not going to come back,*” Harry repeated to himself, more firmly this time, more decisively. It carried assurance that was often associated with speaking orders. “*So I’ll give them something to miss.*”

“*Like what, Master?*” Lutain asked, peering out and slowly sliding out of Harry’s sleeve and onto his lap.

“ *I’ll be turning ten near the start of August. On magical children’s eleventh birthday, they’re given a letter of enrollment for the school Hogwarts. Which means, we have little over a year and a half to learn as many spells in that book as possible,* ” Harry said.

“*Why learn them?*” Lutain inquired, “*Already can magic heat.*”

“ *Wizards know more than just that. I need to learn a few more. Enough that I can do some things that Skylar can’t--* ”

“Master.” Lutain interjected, voice quiet and sounding defeated, *“I thought you let your birth-kin go?”*

Harry felt the instinct to argue rise, but he held it back. Was he still holding on to Lily and James?

Of course he was, that small, dark voice whispered. He was still desperately trying to prove to

them that he was worth something. Or maybe he was trying to prove it to himself? He'd been abandoned, cast aside so easily, and every minute of every day that passed was just a little bit more proof of his value to them.

"*What would you have me do, Lutain?*" Harry sighed, hanging his head and eying a dandelion struggling to sprout. "*What does the mighty snake say I should do?*"

Lutain flicked his tongue and scented the air.

"*Make new kin?*" Lutain offered, "*Hatchling of own?*"

"*Lutain!*" Harry guffawed, trying to resist the sudden urge to laugh, "*I'm not old enough for that!*"

" *All humans look same. Tall and scaleless.* "

" *All snakes look wriggly and hairless.* "

" *Toushes.* "

Harry paused, trying to figure out what Lutain had obviously mispronounced. "*...Toushes?* "

Lutain nodded, agreeing with his word choice in a distinctly human manner. " *Toushes.* "

Harry found himself laughing and was ever so thankful for his reptilian companion. He found out several days later that the word Lutain had remembered wrong was actually *touché* .

Spring hormonal changes and puberty led to a rise in the testosterone and tension in the building.

Harry had finally relaxed, finding peace in his recent epiphany. Then, his trunk had been set on *fire.*

Thankfully the seal was magical and impossible to open, that didn't stop the latches and magical lock from being smashed and damaged beyond use. It would require a spell to unlock the trunk in the state it was now. Harry could have done so, he knew his book detailed a powerful unlocking spell.

Except his book was trapped *inside* the chest.

He was fueled in a sudden bloodlust, knowing full well that David had attempted arson. The older boy constantly yawned or found excuse to flash his uncovered burn directly in Harry's line of sight, staring at him in a silent challenge. ' *Come on, you know you want to.* '

Harry did want to, that was the problem.

Even Suzie had somehow managed to convince her friends and others to rile Harry. Most of the children at the orphanage was well aware of the viciousness between Harry and David. They'd heard the rumors: David had somehow given Harry the scar on his side (which an older boy had seen while stealing Harry's comb one morning), while Harry had returned the favour with the scar on David's hand. One rumor went into depth with how Harry had somehow schemed with a now fired cook to press a burning spatula into David's sleeping palm.

Things had been too quiet, plenty of children had entered the orphanage after Christmas and too many were frothing at the mouth for some sort of action.

It was just bad luck that the straw that broke the camel's back happened to fall the day two well dressed men visited with the intentions of viewing the children.

Harry was outside (like he always preferred to the stuffy quiet of his room) with Lutain.

David approached, a small mob of wide eyed eager children following a short distance behind. Harry sighed, flexing his arm to signal that Lutain should stay quiet.

"What do you want?" Harry sighed, looking as disinterested as possible as the crowd shifted and formed a half ring around them.

David's grin widened, Ralph stepping out from the masses to pass something small into David's hand.

Harry frowned, trying to see exactly what it was that David now had.

"I have a present for you!" David chirped, rocking back and forth on the tips of his toes to the heels, "You'll love it!"

David opened his hand, and revealed a young garden snake. Harry blinked, looking apprehensively between the snake and David.

"*Let down!*" It wailed, the voice was feminine although only barely, "*Eggs! Down!*"

It was a *mother.*

"What are you doing?" Harry struggled to keep his voice calm, recognizing the situation as being a disaster.

"I know you like snakes!" David beamed, his eyes wide with mock kindness, "I'm being generous!"

"*Down!*" she wailed, thrashing her tail nervously, "*Eggs! Hatchlings! Must protect!*"

"*Master…*" Lutain soothed low and quiet, he too was growing anxious with how desperate the mother was to protect her young.

"Why would I want a snake?" Harry said, voice tense though he tried to hide it.

"Well, you always had that one snake, so I thought I should try one." David said nonchalantly, trailing his other fist down her body far too roughly. She cried in pain as he gripped her tightly, "I don't really like it though. My mistake."

Crack.

Harry jolted, already taking a step forward while the mother snake seemed to howl and hiss in pain. Her lower body didn't move, lying limp below David's face.

“ Actually, I take it back. This is kinda fun.” David beamed, hand sliding up an inch before twisting sharply. The snake screamed again as her bones were broken once more.

“Stop it,” Harry growled, voice low and eyes wide in fascinated horror.

“Fine.” David shrugged, eyes getting a wicked gleam as he reached up with one thumb, getting bitten by the weakly snapping jaws of the snake. David didn’t seemed deterred, instead he scowled and grasped the bottom jaw between his fingers.

Harry felt sick, and stared at the chunk of bloody muscle lying on the ground between them.

David laughed, dropped the weakly spasming snake and *stomped.*

Harry punched David in the nose, this time Lutain said nothing to convince him otherwise.

David laughed as he was tackled to the ground. They rolled, David beaming in breathless enthusiasm as he was punched twice more in the face.

“Why are you smiling!” Harry shouted, moving his knee to David’s gut. The other boy wheezed, still breathless as he raised something in his right hand.

“You’re dead,” David wheezed, blood staining his teeth from where it was pooling out of his nose. His right hand was sloppily holding a knife, stolen from the kitchen.

Oh, of course David still wanted revenge.

Harry scrambled back, scurrying across the dirt on his back. He flinched when his fingers accidentally brushed against the mutilated corpse of the worried mother. He had to force down the sickening vomit that threatened to rise up.

“Come here little Harry!” David cooed, slashing outwards with the knife with full intent to do harm. “You’ve been a pain in all of our arses for a long time and now *you’re* going to be the one

screwed up!”

The crowd of kids cheered.

Harry’s eyes watered and his stomach churned and *at what point was this fair!*

“*Master.*” Lutain’s quiet voice brought him back to reality. The snake had slithered down his arm, nestling in the oversized sleeve of his borrowed coat. Lutain was coiled up tightly, like a spring of muscle and scale.

At that moment, Harry had a thought, which seemed to cut through the rising hysteria caused by David’s flashing knife. *Alright Lutain, I hope your bite is as painful as you said.*

Harry nodded frantically, likely looking psychotic as he shakily stood. David grinned, towering inches above Harry.

“You wanna fight like a man?” David chuckled, the crowd watching eagerly for the knick Harry was undoubtedly going to get. “Well, *bring it.* ”

Harry swallowed and lifted his one arm, pointing his hand flat and directly at David. David blinked in confusion, it looked like Harry was offering something on his palm.

" *Bite him, Lutain.* "

David blinked in surprise and started laughing at Harry’s incomprehensible hissing. The children who'd come to gawk mumbled in confusion. Some laughed outright. What was the freak up to?

Lutain lunged. The snake unhinged his jaw, his fangs coming upright as his mouth opened to ridiculous proportions.

David had been too confident he was going to win. He wasn't prepared for Harry's snake. Lutain's fangs pierced somewhere on his upper left shoulder.

Everything seemed to slow to a crawl for Harry. A split second seemed to last forever.

David stumbled back, a confused, dumbfounded look on his face. Around them, the other kids started to react, screaming and scrambling in every direction to get away; was one of them Suzie? Had she seen-

David dropped to the ground, tripping backwards over his own feet. The snake venom couldn't have--

Lutain must've hit a blood vessel, some part of Harry thought. A bloodstain bloomed across David's shirt, quickly getting bigger.

Harry stood transfixed. David just kept bleeding and bleeding. His face had gone pale and his eyes had gone wide.

It was quiet though, almost peaceful. Or maybe Harry was just so focused that he didn't hear David's horrified screaming.

Harry was distantly aware of people rushing over. Someone was screaming David's name. He recognised Madam Clover. She completely ignored Harry, rushing to David's side.

But it was obvious that she didn't know what to do.

David's breath was coming in short, shallow gasps. He wasn't moving quite so much, more twitching than moving really. How much time had gone by?

Muttering hurriedly to herself in words too quiet and too quick for Harry to understand, Madam Clover yanked Davit's shirt up with frantic, shaking hands. His blood was everywhere. How was it possible to bleed that much from such a tiny wound?

"Bloody hell," one of the strangers muttered. It was the first time Harry even noticed their arrival. "It's a ruddy snake bite."

Of course it was a snake bite, Harry thought distractedly.

The other man hissed something quietly to his partner, though Harry couldn't make out the words.

He was looking at Harry suspiciously.

All of the blood did come from the two small puncture wounds left behind by Lutain's fangs. There was only a minor amount of swelling around the actual wounds; it was increasing unequally to the rhythmic pulsing of blood from his body.

"For God's sake, do something!" Madam Clover shouted, her voice shrill with panic. She had her hands pressed over the wound, trying in vain to stop the bleeding. They were absolutely covered in David's blood. "Call an ambulance!"

The two men looked at a loss.

David stopped moving. Then he stopped breathing.

Madam Clover wheeled on Harry. Her face was tear-streaked and her eyes burned with a mix of grief and anger. "You did this!"

She grabbed Harry by the shoulders and started to shake him violently. Harry managed to shove her off. Maybe his magic helped him, he couldn't tell. She fell back, sobbing and grief-stricken and refusing to look at him.

And there was guilt there too, as if acknowledging her own part in this. None of it would have happened if she'd just reined David in, instead of turning a blind eye and letting him to become a monster.

Lutain hissed and Harry felt him tense up, ready to strike again.

" *No Lutain!* "

Harry ignored the strange looks that the two men were giving him. They'd probably just think he was being a freak too; Harry couldn't bring himself to care about their opinions.

" *You didn't tell me this would happen.* "

" *I told you I was dangerous. I strike and they fall.* "

He hadn't meant it. Not like that. At least, that's what Harry tried to tell himself. A small part of him though...

" *I thought Master said for flea-rodent to die.* "

A small part of him knew that David would never mess with him again. Looking down at David's lifeless eyes, a small part of Harry couldn't help but feel satisfied.

He brought this on himself , that small voice in the back of Harry's mind whispered.

Harry agreed. He wanted David to hurt. He wanted David to--

"This is ridiculous," one of the men muttered. He reached into his pocket and he pulled out a wand.

Harry gasped involuntarily, staring in disbelief as the one man pointed it at Madam Clover and muttered a spell. She was knocked down on top of David and she didn't get back up again.

"Alright boy," the other man rasped, pointing his own wand now at Harry. Harry felt a stab of panic. Lutain tensed and hissed menacingly. "I can't believe I'm saying this, but tell that thing to calm down. We aren't going to hurt you."

" *Lutain,* " Harry started, speaking low and cautious. " *Back down.* "

Lutain grumbled, but seemed to calm down a bit. The man at once seemed to relax.

"Good," said the first man, gruffly.

"Bollocks! What do we do now? What's the plan?" The second man demanded.

"You came here with a plan?" Harry echoed. Maybe he was still feeling the shock himself, but he was beginning to feel suspicious. "Why did you come here?"

"For you, Potter," the first man said. "But now our plan's out the bloody window."

"What--" His partner started. He glanced over at Harry. "Oh you can't be serious--"

"What choice do we have? The boy's a bloody parselmouth!" The first man argued angrily, flicking his wand in Harry's direction. "I say we burn this whole place down, take him, and go. You know the Lord's going to wonder too."

"But Rodolphus--"

"Look, think about it for a minute: a *Potter* ?" The man now identified as Rodolphus stressed. "Being a *parselmouth* ?"

The other man seemed conflicted, but he nodded grudgingly.

"Wait-- burn this place down?" Harry said, his brain catching up to their conversation. That sense that something was wrong was suddenly very, very urgent. "I don't--"

"Silence, Potter," the unidentified wizard snapped.

Harry's eyes narrowed and his fingers twitched. There was an uncomfortable pressure between his ears, and before their eyes, the ground around them burst into bright scarlet flames. They licked hungrily at the wizards' boots, though the material seemed to be fireproof.

"Did he just do that *wordlessly* ?" Rodolphus started.

Harry glared and the other man started chuckling. "Alright, he killed a muggle, speaks to snakes, and can do wordless, wandless magic. Bella is going to *love* him."

Harry's eyes went wide and Lutain reared. There was an unfamiliar word and a flash of red. Then, blissful unconsciousness.

Cognizance

Chapter Summary

> Where Harry wakes up, discovers a dysfunctional family, and unleashes his anger on a rat-faced man.

Chapter Notes

> Terribly sorry for the wait. The latter half of the chapter had to be re-written multiple times to finish in a way that made more sense.
> Once again, thanks go out to my marvelous beta who has the confidence and knowledge to tell me when to change things.

Harry woke up to a high pitched squeal and tight arms around his throat. He flailed, hands rising to pry at the bony wrists crushing his neck.

"Oh I love it! It's adorable!" It was a woman's voice, an excited high-pitch. Harry was squeezed and turned, dragged this way and that in an odd parody of an embrace.

"It's not a puppy," someone outside Harry's field of vision grunted, a deeper voice this time, definitely a man's.

At once, the hands let go and Harry dropped onto the wooden floor under him. He coughed, hands rising to rub his bruised throat as he hacked loudly.

Two dainty-looking hands with black nails came into view, resting just a foot away. Harry could see them, his eyes hidden by his fringe of hair.

"Hello?" The woman's voice chirped. She dropped down, lowering until a manic woman's face swam into view, locking eyes with Harry's own eyes. "Hello!"

Harry scrambled back. The woman shifted into a kneel before him and cackled with laughter at his reaction. Her eyes alit at once with amusement at his instinctive fear.

She was tall and thin, with long, thick, and wild black hair, casting a strong contrast to her pale face. Her cheeks and jaw were sculpted with an almost aristocratic beauty Harry almost recognized. She had heavy-lidded dark eyes, giving Harry the impression that she was looking down on something. At the same time, those dark grey eyes glittered gleefully and Harry wasn't entirely sure he wanted to know what she found so funny.

"Who--" Harry croaked, his voice hoarse.

The woman's mouth pursed in concern and, with upsetting speed, she snatched up her wand from a hidden sheath and jabbed it in Harry's direction. "Episkey!"

It felt almost like his neck and throat was filled with cotton. Harry coughed, trying to dislodge the feeling of suffocating.

Then at once, it vanished.

"Better?" The woman cooed, fluttering her long eyelashes and sliding her wand back up her sleeve. She grinned, turning to look up at the two men who were standing by the door. Harry recognised them from the orphanage.

The one on the left, the shorter and thicker of the two, had long hair and a neatly trimmed beard. His face was square, set in a resting scowl as he watched Harry carefully. His eyes glittered maliciously and he gave Harry an uneasy feeling, even though he wasn't doing anything. He reached into his coat and very carefully pulled out a long, dark rope--

"Lutain!" Harry blurted, nearly lunging for the limp figure of his familiar and only hesitating when he saw the woman looking at him curiously.

"Is that the wittle snakey?" She asked the man in a childish voice, blinking and observing Lutain's glossy dark scales.

"Let him go," Harry said quietly, while carefully considering just how hard it would be to set the room around them ablaze.

"Careful," the man warned, setting the snake down on the floor. Lutain was terribly motionless and for a moment, Harry remembered the mother snake and what David had done to her.

"It's dangerous. Killed a boy almost faster than the Lord's," his partner added. He was the taller of the two and rail thin. There was an obvious family resemblance to his partner. They had the same dark eyes. He kept his hair shorter though and he was clean-shaven.

"Really?" The woman asked, a gleeful look in her eyes as she eyed the snake in a new light. She spun suddenly, grabbing Harry again and pulling him against her chest with crushing force. "Oh you are *so* much better than Cissy's brat!"

Harry swallowed. If Lutain had been awake, he would at least have some sort of leverage--

"Oh!" The woman gasped, leaning back and looking like she'd just realised something. There was an almost terrifying and giddy eagerness in her eyes. "I'm Bella! You're my new brat!"

" *What* ?" Harry hissed. Belatedly he realised he'd been speaking in Parseltongue. "Your new *brat* ?"

The woman, Bella, gave him an over exaggerated pout. "Well Cissy has one. Why can't I?"

Harry was stunned. Was she serious?

"The brat is for the Lord."

At once, Bella snatched Harry back and pulled him closer. "Well he's not here now," Bella whined. She grinned manically at Harry. "You want to stay here! We'll have fun!"

"I-I don't..." Harry started.

"I get to teach you all those fun things! I get to teach you spells and how to fight and--" She gasped, suddenly buzzing with excitement again. "And curses!"

Curses? He had to admit, he was very interested, but... There was something about this woman that set him off, something about the two men too. He tried to recall the names of the people his

parents warned him about when he was a child. "What's your full name?"

"Bella! Bellatrix Lestrange!" She giggled, running one of her black-painted fingernails through Harry's messy hair. "Can I name you Septimus?"

"What--" Harry started, for a moment his thoughts distracted from trying to remember by Bella's question. "No! I have a name!"

"He's a Potter, the other twin," the thin man said. "The one his family--"

"They are *not* my family!" Harry snarled angrily, temporarily forgetting just how precarious his position was.

"You were in an orphanage! I adopted you! You're mine! Done!" Bellatrix said, her expression gleeful as she settled back on her heels under her long, poofy black dress. "You'll live here!"

Harry stopped as the full situation set in. Bellatrix Lestrange... *Bellatrix Lestrange* ... The name was so familiar. And then it hit him. She was related to Sirius, a cousin or something. He'd only ever spoken about her with disdain, never saying a good thing about the "deranged Lestrange."

But then... she was actually showing him a tremendous amount of affection and she actually wanted him…

That was new. Harry hadn't ever been wanted before.

"I'll keep you safe," she cooed, pressing his head against her chest where beneath the corset and frills, a loud rhythmic heartbeat thumped in time to the almost clawed hand stroking through his hair. "I'll give you all you want and I can teach you things and you will be so *powerful* !"

It actually sounded heartfelt to Harry, almost as if she really did want a child.

'No,' his mind whispered. 'She wants you.'

But Sirius had never had anything good to say about her! Harry was pretty sure that she was a Death Eater! There were so many reasons why he should do his level best just to get away from this manic madwoman, but those arguments were increasingly meaningless when measured against the fact that she actually *wanted* him.

“Stay with me,” she spoke, her voice enthralling Harry into a growing sense of contentment, “I’ll be what you never had.”

Harry liked the sound of that.

Harry was hurriedly escorted into another room by Rabastan, the taller of the two men from before, he was pushed relatively gently through the large doors before they closed softly behind him.

The room that Harry now found himself in was large and empty except the large fireplace and a short squat man in the corner who curled in on himself. The man had a face that reminded Harry of Piers.

There was a tall, high-backed chair in the middle of the room, facing a low green fireplace directly across the room.

Harry shifted his weight, incredibly uncomfortable without the muscular chill of Lutain under his clothing.

He felt something stir, something deep in the crevice of his mind which leant his body comfort. He relaxed, rather against his will as something clicked and felt so abnormally right about being in the room.

It scared him, as much as he loathed to admit it.

" *I smell prey.* " A distinctly feminine voice whispered, a low lilt similar to the python he'd released by accident lifetimes ago. There was a soft shuffling noise, the familiar sound of scales sliding over carpet, and from in front of the fireplace the largest snake Harry had ever seen peered around and looked at him with eyes that seemed to glow.

" *A hatchling, large hatchling.* " She huffed, looking put out at the realization, " *Hard to eat.* "

The man in the corner whimpered quietly, shifting and looking almost terrified.

"Why were you brought here?" The voice was raspy and somehow at the same time high-pitched. It sent a shiver of fear down Harry's spine. He swallowed and somehow, inexplicably, he knew.

This was Voldemort.

Harry didn't know what to do. He felt like he wanted to cry.

" *Let me eat him,* " the large snake hissed.

"Why," Voldemort- it *had* to be him- demanded again. "Why were you brought before me?"

Harry fidgeted under the unwavering stare of the huge snake, which watched his every move. Lutain's words came back to him once again. " *Make yourself necessary.* "

Harry straightened, taking a calming breath and forcing away his terror. He knew what to say.

" *My name is Harry Potter and you have beautiful scales.* " Harry knew Lutain was always pleased with compliments about his hunting prowess. " *Your eyes must scare prey so well.* "

The snake reared back so suddenly and unexpectedly, it almost looked like she was going to strike. She raised herself up, towering high, coming almost to Harry's shoulder. She tasted the air repeatedly, as though trying to decide what this new development meant.

"Harry Potter..." Voldemort drawled, drawing the words out. "And you speak Parseltongue. Fascinating."

" *You are not prey,* " the snake decided, lowering herself and sliding towards Harry. She tasted the

air again curiously. " *You speak. Do you know others that speak?* "

" *I have a close friend. His scales are dark and his strike is quick,* " Harry offered, feeling more comfortable with every passing moment.

The snake seemed pleased and turned to slither back towards the fireplace, where it was warm.

"Harry Potter," Voldemort hissed again. And now his voice held something different. It sounded almost like he was laughing. "The Boy-Who-Lived."

"N-no," Harry blurted out, this time in English. He took a few unconscious steps forward, his mind screaming at him the whole time to get away. "That's-- that's Skylar."

"Do you not think," Voldemort started, his voice cold and hateful, sending another shiver down Harry's spine. "That I know which child I struck?"

Harry felt a weight settle on his shoulders.

"Skylar is--"

"No," Voldemort laughed. Harry had no idea just what was so funny. "The old fool...he is wrong."

Dumbledore was wrong.

Skylar wasn't special. Skylar had *never* been special to begin with.

Harry never had to be- He couldn’t wrap his mind around the concept. Lily and James were wrong, everyone was *wrong*.

The man in the corner seemed to have found his backbone. He sneered and somehow found the situation amusing as well. He chortled out a series of nasally giggles that were more irritating than Harry would have ever expected.

Harry had been thrown away-- and *he* was the one that should've been protected!

Suddenly, Harry felt overcome by a wave of indescribable rage. Depression, anger, and potent self-loathing washed over him and, as the short, balding man continued his irritating laughter at Harry's misfortune, Harry wanted someone to *hurt* .

Harry watched, almost outside of his own body, as the balding man stopped laughing and gasped. His eyes bulged. He fell to the floor, his entire body twitching, wracked with spasms. He took great gasping breaths, but he couldn't scream, couldn't make a sound.

Dumbledore had been *wrong,* Harry's life had been a *lie.*

The room filled with high-pitched laughter, breaking Harry's concentration. Harry blinked, the buzzing in his ears ended and the now whimpering man on the floor let out a relieved breath. Harry realised that he'd done that. He'd been angry and he wanted to *hurt* someone.

"So much potential," Voldemort mused. A small, skeletal hand tapped slowly on the armrest and Harry now wondered why Voldemort hadn't risen to face him. Something about that hand just looked wrong…

" *Nagini, I--* " Voldemort stopped, suddenly. "Boy!"

Harry jolted, panic rising once again.

Then something exploded in his head and Harry dropped to the ground clutching his forehead with both hands. There was something moving through his mind, bringing searing pain before it shifted suddenly, becoming calming and relaxing, soothing like rain on scalding skin. Harry blinked dazed, feeling tears running down his face.

The large snake now identified as Nagini was very close to Harry's face, peering down at him intently.

" *Nagini, fetch Bellatrix. She may show our new... guest around his new estate.* "

Harry mused distantly, how the large snake was going to communicate with the witch.

" *Den-mate!* " Nagini hissed pleased, sliding over towards the door and pushing it with her blunt snout. *“Hatchling! Teach to strike, teach to hunt!”*

The balding man was still twitching on the floor, leaving Harry alone with the creature in the chair.

Somehow, the part of him that had felt relaxed suddenly made sense. Harry couldn’t explain it, but there was a part of Voldemort that felt so soothing and it whispered sweet nothings that it was right to be here.

His mind was stagnant with turmoil. Skylar was destined to be the Chosen Boy. *Skylar* was the one prophesized.

It had never been Harry. It had *never* been *Harry.*

The epiphany finally sunk into the recesses of Harry’s mind- the full ramifications of the information striking him in a single clear moment.

He made the rat faced man beg for mercy.

Reorientation

Chapter Summary

> Where Adrian meets a shady boy in a shady place he most likely shouldn't be in. That never stopped him before.

Chapter Notes

> At the current rate, Adrian should be in Hogwarts in the chapter after the next. You're in for a treat- the next chapter has a Skylar cameo

Adrian Selwyn woke up to soft light drifting through his window over his sheets and his face, as well as the sound of something outside exploding.

The boy rolled his eyes, groaning against the light although he rose. The sheets were pushed back and he slid out of the bed with little resistance. The aged floorboards creaked slightly under his feet.

"Not morning. Still rest," Lutain argued quietly, still coiled on his magically heated stone near the wardrobe.

"For you. I'm not that lucky," Adrian corrected, yawning while opening the large wardrobe to select the outfit for the day.

Adrian Lestrange, his name practically a nickname to the actual legal name registered with the ministry **:** Hadrianus Selwyn, a name that evidently had some sort of latin prefix and suffix root word meaning he wasn't aware of. He didn't care. The name was similar enough to Harry that it wouldn't be questioned if any mistakes happened.

There was a sense of... *relief,* that accompanied his name changing legally and secretly in the ministry of magic archive. He was… he *wasn't* part of the *Potters* anymore **;** he was completely separated.

And then Bella dragged him out of bed months ago in the middle of the night, nearly having Lutain bite her if not for Nagini arriving and hissing something to the small lethal serpent.

Adrian, still practically asleep, hadn't understood what was going on. He flailed, shouted, and set fire to a few things (which Bella found absolutely adorable, the sadist she was).

When he came to after being stunned, he was given a potion and a ritual knife he was apparently supposed to drag across his palm.

Adrian hadn't quite understood but, somehow through the loud rambles and Bella's excited squeals, he had managed to grasp the basics that it was some sort of blood adoption-- something to physically alter his features. Adrian was aware he looked identical to his renowned father. It was

inconvenient. The blood adoption was supposed to change that.

Adrian knew that he was *useful* ; they wouldn't outright kill him. He was important, or necessary for plans he hadn't quite understood yet. So he did what was expected, and drank whatever concoction Bella had given him.

It was certainly strange, Adrian thought later, that he possessed absolutely *no* physical features of either of the Lestranges after the ritual was over. His features were delicate. He had high, aristocratic cheekbones. His eyes were large and framed with dark, medium lashes, and he had a thin nose and sharp jaw. His hair was straight with an almost blueish hue in bright lighting.

Bellatrix had apparently been stunned and nearly obsessive when Adrian had returned from the blood adoption ritual. It wasn't until Nagini had commented on his hair that it clicked just *who* had adopted him.

Adrian wretched himself sick.

That was the night when Harry James Potter became Hadrianus "Adrian" Selwyn.

"*Can I have a mouse?*" Lutain yawned, jarring Adrian's attention back to the here and now. The little snake unhinged his jaw with a snap of cartilage.

"Maybe," Harry mused, watching as Lutain's tongue flickered in understanding. He had been working on teaching Lutain English, it was useful for spying on others.

Harry grabbed a change of clothing, sliding into the shirt and trousers.

He heard another crash from outside, causing him to peer out grudgingly.

Well, nothing was broken, or on fire.

"*Master, time to go?*" Lutain asked, rising and wavering in the air. Adrian turned, reaching down with his left arm where Lutain coiled loosely around the wrist and pulled himself up his arm up towards Adrian's shoulders.

The two descended the large although poorly maintained stairs, sliding around the loose railing to pad towards the kitchen where platters of food had already been prepared, courtesy of the house elf.

Rodolphus, seated at the nearby table, didn't bother to look up when Adrian kicked out a nearby chair and dropped into it.

"We have business." Rodolphus muttered, not looking up from his paper. Instead he flipped through it, reading intently a section Adrian had not the patience or interest to care about.

"Don't you always?" Adrian muttered under his breath, glancing under his darkened straight bangs, noticing the slight quirk of the elder man's mouth.

"That we do," He agreed without showing actual interest. "Bella's out with someone from the ministry."

"Torturing?" Adrian guessed dryly, poking at the now mangled contents of his breakfast.

Rodolphus neither confirmed nor denied it. It was a rhetorical question anyway.

With his eleventh birthday only a few weeks away, Adrian Selwyn was getting used to the new dynamic of his house. Although archaic and ghastly with few, if any, morals, it was immeasurably better than the tainted memories of the orphanage or the Dursleys.

At first it had horrified him and made him sick to his stomach, made him lock himself away from the rest of the people who lived here. No amount of coaxing or cooing from Bellatrix could convince him to open the enchanted door.

It had taken a week and the only reason he left was the house elf's inability to bring a mouse alongside his meals. Lutain was *ravenous* . Bellatrix had made a peace offering of a living chipmunk.

Bellatrix was eccentric and sickeningly cruel, but sometimes, randomly, she could be so affectionate and agreeable that it was... *comforting* . In her own way, she was endearing and each compliment she managed to casually give made Adrian warm up to her just a little bit more.

' *Your eyes are like the killing curse. They're amazing.* '

Minor things continuously managed to leave Adrian unsure, wavering and internally conflicted on how he should feel. After a year, he stopped caring. After a year, he started *liking* it.

Bellatrix was probably insane, she was a terrible mother (heaven forbid Adrian ever think of her as his *actual* mother), but she was so much *better* . "Hello!" Bellatrix exclaimed, throwing the door open hard enough to crack into the plaster on the opposite side of the hinges. Adrian didn't look up, the sound was quite common.

Bellatrix moved over to the food platters, giggling to herself as she mangled pancakes between her fingers.

"You have a mission?" Adrian asked, not bothering to look behind him. She drifted over to the table. She was wearing an outfit that at one point must have been fairly expensive. Now though it was stained with blood and torn in places, exposing the pale skin in some places.

"Yes!" She hissed out with delight, her eyes lighting up with manic glee that he had come to associate with her. Adrian barely blinked at it. " *He* has a task for us!"

Which honestly wasn't unexpected at this point.

"Anything new?" Adrian asked quietly, spearing a bit of fruit a lot more forcefully than necessary using his fork.

Adrian had learned of his own task. Bubbling through his blood and seared into his mind with the branding imprint of scales and rhythmic pulsating of '*Dumbledore... Dumbledore... Dumbledore...*' His mission was quite obvious and easy to interpret: he was to spy on Dumbledore and not get caught.

Easier said than done, Adrian thought.

"I have this new curse," Bellatrix gushed, flopping into a nearby chair and twisting her features into an unhinged grin.

Adrian grimaced and absentmindedly rubbed his upper left arm, where a thin white scar had been ingrained in his skin. Bellatrix noticed the movement and pouted as only she could, crossing her

arms disappointed. “That was an *accident!* ”

“It was fully intentional and you know that,” Adrian snapped back. Bellatrix wavered before grudgingly agreeing.

Rodolphus rolled his eyes, well-used to the almost psychotic interactions of his unstable ‘family.’

“Why don’t you take the boy to get a new book of curses,” Rodolphus sighed, finally glancing up with disguised amusement. “Merlin knows he’ll learn more than whatever you teach him.”

Bellatrix continued to pout, plucked a toast soldier from Adrian’s plate and ate it obnoxiously.

It was true, Adrian did enjoy books. It hadn’t also taken long for Rodolphus and Bellatrix to realize just how fascinated he was with magical creatures. Rabastan came to visit with a runespoor one day. It made terrible conversation -- its multiple heads kept arguing with each other -- but it also kept Adrian’s attention.

“ *New book?”* Lutain hissed interestedly, peering out from under Adrian’s clothing to slither lazily across the table. “ *More rats?* ”

“Is there a store for rats?” Adrian sighed, stroking one finger down Lutain’s dark back.

“Magical Menagerie in Diagon Alley,” Rodolphus drawled, “Varmint and Underden in Knockturn.”

Adrian gave a short nod, looking at Bellatrix who hummed and tapped her chin dramatically with one black tipped manicured nail. “Ooh, I could go to Knockturn.”

“Good, then we’re going,” Adrian announced, standing upright and holding one arm out. *“Lutain?”*

Bellatrix’s face split with an infectious smile as it always did when he spoke Parseltongue. Lutain obliged, sliding upwards and around his forearm under his shirt sleeve.

“Set up an account with Underden, they’ll send you things on schedule to Hogwarts,” Rodolphus grunted, looking like he may say more before falling silent and saying nothing else.

Adrian didn’t mind, he could figure it out on his own.

Diagon Alley was crowded with students already shopping for goods before the list for Hogwarts was even sent out. Children, only slightly older or younger than himself, bustled about with their wizarding parents, urging at them to get a wand before the muggleborn rush. Adrian had already gotten his months before, holly and phoenix feather.

He had also invested in a bird for messages, something faster and stronger than the everyday owl. A gyrfalcon, a beautiful white bird with markings like a snowy owl. Her eyes were golden and intelligent. Adrian named her Hedwig.

Hedwig had already proven her worth **;** she had claimed the highest nest of the Lestrange owelry. She ate mice and sometimes hunted extra for Lutain.

“Alright, Adrian, I’ll be in Knockturn. You know what to do,” Bellatrix spoke under her breath

with a hushed voice. Bellatrix gave him a manic grin, her eyes lighting up, as she passed along a bulging coin purse. Although not pinned down by the ministry, it was common knowledge that she was a strong follower of the Dark. Along with her husband and brother-in-law, Bellatrix tended to avoid places like Diagon Alley and the ministry regulations that came with them.

“Follow the smoke,” Adrian said dryly, arching one eyebrow as Bellatrix giggled. She pulled her hood down lower and slunk off in the direction of the poorly-lit Knockturn Alley.

Adrian could get most of his Hogwarts shopping done now. He turned sharply, eying most of the stores along the strip and only sidestepping when a bustling family tried to force their way past. He was fairly certain that he already owned the necessary books for first year, although possibly not, given the fact the Defense Against the Dark Art’s position was ‘cursed.’

(Bellatrix had laughed openly while telling him the story.)

Although, Adrian *could* use another trunk, the one he had owned was, according to his understanding, buried under ash and remnants of a collapsed building.

“*Mice!*” Lutain hissed, writhing excitedly towards the depths of Knockturn alley, undoubtedly ravenous for anything he could get.

Adrian sighed, glancing once more down the busy streets of Diagon before smoothly turning and walking into the much darker alleyways of Knockturn.

Lutain slithered out, finding his place of comfort around Adrian’s neck. His presence proved intimidating and almost immediately several old hags with greedy looks backed away frightened. Lutain’s sharp fangs and loud hiss deterred most creatures.

Adrian absentmindedly ducked under one side stall advertising loudly about what looked like engraved skulls-- a few even looked human.

“*I want to check the bookstore*,” Adrian hissed lowly, the action didn't seem that strange with the collection of vampires in the area. “*Would you like to get the mice first?*”

“*After*,” Lutain decided, flicking his tongue curiously. “*Mice make me slow.*”

It was true, Lutain tended to lapse into a near comatose though happy state of mind after a large meal.

Adrian turned the corner, walking past a loud pub called the White Wyvern and then past an archaic barber shop. A tall imposing store with cobweb-filled windows rested on the corner, large enough to stand out in the tightly packed Alley.

Cobb and Webb’s was a large ambiguous store, selling books as well as other fascinating objects. Its book selection was vast and impressive, drawing Adrian’s attention as it had on his first introduction to Knockturn Alley and multiple times after.

The storekeeper was an old man with pupiless white eyes, though that didn’t inhibit his ability to see. He had a large smile, mouth extending a centimeter past the limits of a normal grin. Adrian did not know what sort of creature he was, nor did he particularly care.

Adrian was not alone in the store. He walked straight towards the bookshelves and past an uncomfortable older boy a few years Adrian’s senior. The boy jumped, looking around paranoid before quickly returning to the book he had plucked from the shelf. Adrian could only assume that it was something most others would call illegal.

Adrian walked past, his shoes still gave the small clicking noise despite having been bought several years past. The sound was loud and quickly drew the older boy's paranoid eyes once again.

The bookshelf Adrian had visited before left him with a thick tome, a list of various spells although all were fairly neutral and unspecialized. Bellatrix had gotten him more books since then, casually filled with darker hexes and curses then anything Adrian would buy on his own.

He smiled at the shelf, recognizing the small cracks in the wood and the distinct prock marks he remembered. The shelf wasn't restocked, most of the books weren't purchased from a publisher to begin with. Most likely they were donated or sold from pure blood families, Adrian suspected there wasn't a single duplicate in the store.

"*Master!*" Lutain suddenly urged, poking up and out of his sleeve. His tongue flickered wildly, tasting the air hungrily. "*I smell a rat.*"

Without any further cue Adrian lowered his arm and enabled Lutain to drop freely to the ground in pursuit of the vermin.

Adrian had been flipping through the pages of an interesting book on mind magics, when he heard a loud shout. Undoubtedly Lutain had scared the teenager who had been browsing a few rows over.

Adrian sighed, snapping his book shut in annoyance while he stomped towards the ruckus. Lutain was indeed scaring the teenager from earlier, putting on a dramatic show of hisses and tight coils.

The sadist was even *laughing* at how terrified the boy was, though only Adrian could understand it.

"Lutain," Adrian bit out, looking thoroughly frustrated as the teenager's head snapped in his direction. "Stop it. Find the rat or come here."

Lutain understood the gist of it, thankfully due to Adrian's tedious English lessons. Lutain returned to a low coil before he slithered out of sight. The teenager glared pointedly at Adrian, assuming that it was his fault the entire encounter happened.

"Lutain does what he wants," Adrian explained bluntly, the older boy sniffing annoyed.

"Well bloody *banish* the thing," he grumbled, trying to retain his composure, "Merlin knows how you conjured that with the trace-- what are you, *twelve?"*

"Lutain is my familiar." Adrian's expression became slightly more standoffish. He didn't see a reason to correct this boy on his age.

"Oh? A familiar, eh?" The teenager said, perking up. He looked considering, before giving a rather wolfish grin. "You smuggle that into Hogwarts then?"

Adrian only blinked slowly.

"Tell you what," the teenager lowered to the floor, suddenly looking much more casual and comfortable given the situation. "That snake of yours could be useful. You too if you're venturing around here, given how young you are."

"It's not dangerous if you know what to do," Adrian cautioned, causing the boy to chuckle.

"True, the names Calum MacTuer. It could be useful to have someone helping with the goods, a uh, an *incentive* ," said the teenager. The boy winked conspiratorially.

“You sell things at Hogwarts?” Adrian guessed. He was interested.

“Got it in one, mate, although some buyers don't want to cough up the coin.”

“You want Lutain to make sure they pay,” Adrian mused, his mind starting to understand the situation he was in. The fence of Hogwarts? It was terribly convenient to have contacts for stolen objects or potion ingredients.

“Hadrianus Selwyn,” Adrian introduced. “Incoming first year.”

“ *First* year? Merlin that works out great,” Calum’s eyes were practically glowing with enthusiasm, though he was uncertain about something. “Hey, you related to those eh, that Selwyn family?”

“No,” Adrian said simply. “It's a common surname.”

Calum relaxed instantly, “good to know. Information is worth coin and coin makes you useful if you spend it right.”

‘*You're rather dull, aren't you?*’ Adrian thought to himself, he’d give this Calum a few years after graduating before being arrested by the Aurors.

“Here.” Calum struggled with his bag, Adrian was suddenly suspicious he was planning on stealing all the books anyways, and passed over a decently slim book. “That’s all spells for business and trades. Good stuff there, mate.”

Calum winked again. Did the teenager genuinely believe he ran some sort of...Hogwarts *black market* ?

“I’ll be in touch,” Calum gave an intrusive pat on Adrian’s shoulder, before rising and waltzing out of the library section, suddenly much more paranoid while walking towards the front of the store.

“*The rat was the human*,” Lutain hissed, peering out from under the shelf.

“*Calum was the rat?*” Adrian blinked, glancing at his friend surprised. “*Like Pettigrew?*”

Lutain gave a low hiss of agreement, sliding under the shelves stealthily.

Calum was an Animagus. Wasn't that interesting…? Adrian doubted anyone knew that about the boy, given his profession. Being an Animagus *did* seem to be a useful ability...

“*Lutain*,” Adrian hissed under his breath. “*Come on.*”

Adrian turned and quickly walked around the around the rows of shelves, glancing down the aisles to try and find the tomes on wandless magic. He found them mixed with books on toxicology and natural poisons. Say what you would about Flourish and Blotts, they knew how to organise; while the selection in here was fantastic for the more… esoteric subjects, the organisation left a lot to be desired.

There were three books on the Animagus transformation. Adrian knew he didn't have enough gold on him at the time to actually purchase all of them, as well as what he’d come for *and* the book Calum gave him. He pulled out the cheapest of the three, before returning to the section he’d come from. He pulled a single, slim volume from the shelf. The name of which had been ingrained into his mind with airy high pitch sounds which left him shaking.

Occlumency.

“Let’s get started.”

Inception

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian meets a blond hair peacock, insults a few store owners, and spots something which makes him flinch.

Chapter Notes

Here's your first look at Skylar since such a long time ago.

The streets of Knockturn Alley were indeed something startling. Humanoid creatures waked past with long lumbering steps, pausing only to hiss loudly in his direction. One humanoid creature made a chuffing noise, before reaching *into* its mouth and pulling out a living blackbird. Another woman grinned in his direction, her eyes rolling around in her head before falling out of the sockets dramatically.

Adrain was almost certain that the occupants were *trying* to scare him. When one vampire slid against him- its stone cold skin touching his own, it inhaled deeply and made a sort of feline purring noise deep in his throat.

Adrian was ever so thankful for having Lutain so close to him.

When Lutain pulled, jerking away from Adrian's skin towards a series of steps leading down another path, Adrian couldn't resist. Lutain was his security; if his friend wanted to go a specific way or venture off the trail he wouldn't argue.

Lutain wavered, wriggling in the air in a lethargic daze. His eyes had clouded and his tongue limply hung from his jaws like a dog.

"Lutain?" Adrian hushed, alarmed by the state of his friend. "*Lutain?* "

He heard it then: a melodic trilling noise. It was foreign and captivating, every instinct in his blood was pulsing and screaming ' *wrong wrong wrong!* '

Adrian stepped further into the open against his better judgement.

The sound abruptly ended, ringing hollowly and emptily in the silence. Lutain reeled back, gaining composure whilst a creature in an archaic fountain recoiled in surprise.

She (If Adrain could trust the body shape and long hair) was young but still years older than Adrian, closer to Calum in age, but just foreign enough that Adrian wasn't quite sure. Her skin was pale and she had dark hair, separated into long wet strands either from the fountain or biological oil. She blinked rapidly with bulbous, round eyes. She had a speckling of what looked like a sort of disease around her exposed collarbone, shimmering like scales (Adrian felt uncomfortable when he realized they most likely *were* scales).

"*The sound*," Lutain hissed, tail thrashing in annoyance. "*You stopped*."

The creature blinked, pulling back and slinking below the fountain rim hesitantly, "I regret, Sharptail."

Adrian blinked, and took a half step backwards. The rusting iron of the fountain, alongside the dripping water looked suspiciously like blood over the edge of the rim.

"You understood him?" Adrian asked cautiously. The creature tilted her head, her ears were humanoid.

Adrian's mind bubbled in fascination at such a magical creature.

"You do," She pointed out, voice lilting and somehow chirping like a bird, although still guttural and awkward. "You reek dark."

Adrian swallowed, taking a step forward once he spotted what looked like a green fin just below the surface.

"*What creature?*" Lutain hissed, peering up and scenting the air, *"You scent of strange."*

" *You* smell sour," The woman (was it a woman) retorted, scowling at Adran. "You smell *foul.* Torn, ripped and shoved into something which you are not."

Adrian frowned, his hand started to slide towards his wand.

The creature pulled one smooth arm over the edge of the fountain, dirtying the pale skin with rust. Its nails shimmered and reflected like opals, webbing between the digits at the base.

"*You speak venom!*" Lutain hissed, infuriated by the apparent insult. "*How dare!*"

"Not dare. Not insult. How peculiar," the creature warbled. It tilted its beautiful yet unsettling head. "How peculiar. You smell of human child, you are but you are more."

"You're obviously not human. Not a Grindylow, or a Siren. Or a Banshee half-blood," Adrian noted, trying to work out what she was by eliminating what she wasn't from a list of things he knew about, information he had long thought useless. He was at a loss, Adrian admitted to himself after a long moment.

"I am Carpatha," the woman trilled, voice somehow resembling a lark's teeter. Was that her name or her species, Adrian wondered. She grinned at him, teeth perhaps just a bit more pointed. "I am a Merrow. My kin are far, in warmer waters. I like these waters. I don't often get visitors."

"*You're in a bowl,*" Lutain noted, seeming fascinated with the Merrow. "*How do you flee?*"

Carpatha blinked, perhaps surprised by Lutain's question. "I walk."

Adrian couldn't help but glance back at what he'd thought was a fin before. "You walk?"

The Merrow grinned at him and seemed fascinated. She blinked slowly and for a moment looked far too intelligent for Adrian's comfort. "I can walk. I speak to everything. Everything speaks to *me* ."

"Merrow are rare. Why hasn't anyone killed you yet?" Adrian felt his fingers close around his wand, a comforting weight in his hand. "I hear your tails are very, very rare."

She laughed, a soothing noise that relaxed Adrian against his will. Then she *barked,* a strange warbling noise that somehow compelled a nearby crow to swoop and hop onto the fountain near her back.

“Cra!” she cooed, pointing a finger at the crow. “Cra is my eyes, he is my *bite.* ”

She hissed, a thin spine rising from where it had been lying flat on her back. He suddenly felt very very wary for Lutain.

“We’ll see you again,” Adrian said nodding, turning and starting to walk away.

“You reek!” She called after him. Adrian heard a wet sloshing noise, but he didn’t turn to see what the Merrow was doing. “You carry something festering!”

She laughed, Adrian wished he could find it in him to think the sound was ugly.

Bellatrix tossed a small coin purse of galleons at Adrian the moment a tawny brown owl fluttered into the estate with a sealed envelope addressed to *Mr. Hadrianus Selwyn-Riddle.*

Adrian froze in horror at the name. Bella only huffed, and with one spell and her wand she crossed out the last portion of his surname. Accordingly, she assured it would be removed from the rolls at Hogwarts.

Adrian was relieved, a part of him was almost ecstatic that the adoption *had* happened. The name was proof enough.

He used the floo to go to Diagon Alley in a black cloak and dark green robes. Lutain was curled around his throat, lazily sprawled without actually showing any signs of threat.

The streets were absolutely *filled.*

Adrian grimaced. Families bustled about, frustrated parents trying to get everything on their children’s school lists, while their children ran too and fro, shouting loudly about the latest broomsticks or smart-eyed owls or one of any number of other things.

Flourish and Blotts was raking in the gold, having a monopoly on the necessary supplies, and they knew it. Adrian double-checked his list of books and groaned slightly. He’d already read books with similar difficulty levels *ages* ago.

Frowning, Adrian picked up his books, joining a long queue of parents waiting to pay. When he was (finally) done, he moved to a shop that specialized in trunks, just off the center path of Diagon alley. Despite owning a decent amount of possessions, Adrian didn't actually have a good trunk.

The shop was suffering from a sale, though it seemed most new wizards didn't venture away from the main strip. The shopkeeper was eager to meet Adrian, not blinking or commenting on Lutain.

Adrian settled on a trunk that was entirely black though otherwise unremarkable, which still managed to be attention-grabbing in its own way. The trunk had multiple interchangeable compartments, built in wards to protect from fires or thieves and it was password protected to open a smaller, private compartment. It was purchased for a moderate sum.

Adrian felt that parsletongue (which was a nearly extinct ability) was the safest password he knew.

The shopkeeper directed Adrian to another shop, a workshop run by one of the man's relatives which specialised in other containers or miscellaneous objects with other enchantments and charms. Lutain was thrilled at the small engraved crate which opened to a larger heated area for basking and sleeping.

Lutain was in a positively thrilled mood and Adrian was feeling light hearted, weaving through the crowd while his friend rambled on about his favorite conversations with Nagini. Adrian managed to wriggle through a group of excited children (his classmates, he realized with a sigh) into Magical Menagerie.

He could see cages filled with cats and kneezles, hounds and designer dogs. Bright parrots flew overhead to roost on ledges and stands. Falcons and eagles sat on decorative branches while giant spiders skittered about in wood shavings.

Lutain instantly perked up and glanced around the store, eyes moving to spot the dozing mice and rats behind glass cages.

Adrian flinched when he saw an absolutely miserable snake curl in on itself tightly in one overly humid enclosure.

He walked over to it, touching the glass with resentment. The snake-- a thick mass of muscle with an almost adorable sudden short tail, looked at him, its every movement screaming exhaustion.

"What ails you, bright-eyes?" Lutain hissed, peering through the glass.

The snake on the other side began to unravel, tilting its head confused at its new conversation.

"*I am of sand, not wet and cold,*" it grunted, voice somehow feminine although layered with something muffled and sick.

"Ah! Interested in our new python!" An employee made his way over towards Adrian, looking slightly harried by the sheer volume of shoppers but still trying to present that cheerful, helpful look of underpaid employees everywhere.

"It's a viper," Adrian said bluntly. He scowled. "Not a python."

The attendant blinked in surprise.

"You should probably move her. She'll get sick in humidity," Adrian noted, frowning at the full body tremor down its scales.

"Look I- I'm sorry, lad," the man apologized, "But our shop policy says we can't take out any dangerous animal during open hours. Besides, I doubt you actually know what kind of snake that is--"

Lutain chose that moment to hiss loudly and stare directly at the man in the eye.

Adrian forced a fairly pleasant expression, ignoring the man's sudden pallor, the nervous widening of his eyes. " *Fine* . Of *course,* how would someone like myself ever know anything about snakes? My apologies. Incidentally, I *do* need a few mice. Maybe a regular schedule for shipping if your shop is setup for such a thing." Adrian paused, feigned being lost in thought. "given that it is distinctly a *snake* thing, I wouldn't be surprised if you don't."

Adrian should not have been as satisfied as he was with purchasing two white mice.

He nearly laughed when Lutain managed to scarf one down on the checkout counter in front of the already nervous cashier.

The bright flash of blond hair had Adrian moving before he could think. Lutain was confused, he tightened his hold as best he could as Adrian moved quickly.

" *Master, what--* "

" *Hush Lutain.* "

Adrian pulled out from the crowd the moment he saw the elder man walk away into the goblin bank. The man's wife separated exchanging terse words, before leaving their son outside the steps looked thoroughly miffed although still proud.

Adrian smiled, then stepped out directly in front of the boy.

Instantly Draco Malfoy's eyes snapped to his.

"Draco Malfoy," Adrian addressed, giving a slight bow while his eyes appraised the boy across from him, "a pleasure to meet you in the flesh."

Draco's nose lifted and he sniffed in disdain.

"Of course, I'll be seeing you much more," Adrian calmly assured. "In Slytherin preferably."

"So you agree Slytherin is the best house." Draco's eyes gleamed, curious and flinty at the same time. His voice didn't leave room to actually answer the rhetorical question. "I don't think I am aware of your house. Perhaps your head of house works alongside my father?"

Adrian had expected the question and had prepared accordingly.

"My name is Hadrianus Selwyn, Adrian for short." He clarified at Draco's interested glance, "I am not related to the pureblood house Selwyn of native Britain. I come from an alternate pureblood house. Instead of offering information regarding my house, I instead offer my services."

Draco blinked.

"There are multiple actions a pureblood heir may not be able to participate in while under heavy scrutiny." Adrian lowered his voice and leant forward politely, "especially within the walls of Hogwarts with such a noble name as your own."

Draco looked stunned and rather at a loss for what to say. In the pause where Draco quickly composed a response, a loud angry shout echoed over the bustle of Diagon Alley.

The two jerked around and spotted a fuming boy storming out from Ollivanders. Draco instantly began laughing. Adrian looked further-- the boy had dark brown hair, almost reddish in the afternoon light. He was taller than Adrian, broader with the slight pudge of baby fat still clinging around his jaw.

Adrian noticed his eyes and felt like he had been hit with one of Bella's curses.

"Wonder what got Potter in a riot," Draco sneered, almost forgetting Adrian was nearby. The latter stared, dazed, and made a low keening noise as someone with red hair hurried to catch up to the boy.

Skylar Potter. And their-- *Skylar's* mother.

“Maybe they didn’t have the wand he wanted.” Adrian’s voice sounded hollow and breathless to his own ears. Draco said something in return, but Adrian didn’t hear. The alley was suddenly so *loud,* yet he wasn’t able to actually decipher a single word in the chaos.

He saw Lily manage to meet up with Skylar. Her brow was furrowed in the way it only ever did when she was saying something to comfort hi-- *Skylar.*

Lily leant down and pulled Skylar into a hug.

Adrian twitched and blinked slowly at the hand which had rather forcefully jabbed into his side.

“Oh, so you’re back *now?”* Draco sneered, looking frustrated and annoyed with Adrian.

Lutain chose that moment to appear, poking his head out from Adrian’s collar and tasting the air with the slowness only his digestion ever really inspired.

Adrian gave an almost arrogant nod and stalked off. If everything worked out as he anticipated it, Adrian would have his name spread relatively quickly. Once he was known, he could remove Calum and secure his necessity in Hogwarts. Then, Adrian could move up through Hogwarts, surpass *him* in every way, and demand *respect.* Everything would work.

This time, *he* would be the victor.

(History was always written by the victors.)

Sorting

Chapter Summary

Adrian gets sorted, lives with a bird, and prepares for an eventful year.

Chapter Notes

Most descriptions of the Slytherin rooms I took from the text, what I didn't find I simply envisioned myself. More detail will be provided over the years to end with a complete idea of the house.

Thanks again to my wonderful beta, and to each and every one of you who review after reading.

The Hogwarts Express was simultaneously exciting and disappointment.

Some part of Adrian wished for something... *more* . He didn't know what he had expected in retrospect. It was a large train, ample room for movement and more compartments on the inside than it should've had. He'd managed to claim a large empty compartment for himself. The train was magical in how quickly it flew across the countryside; the view outside the windows was just a blur of greys and greens and browns. Adrain was almost positive the amount of rail didn't actually exist in the eyes of muggles.

Still, something about it just felt... *lacking* though.

Twenty minutes into the long trip, his compartment door slid open and he was met with the familiar face of Calum.

"Harry!" The older boy cheered, causing Adrian to freeze entirely.

How did this--

"You don't mind if I call you Harry, do ya?" The boy grinned larger. "Much easier to remember than that Hadrianian mouthful."

"Adrian," he corrected with forced laziness, eying the boy critically. "Did you learn those curses you were looking at?"

Calum's cheerful expression fell very quickly into something serious. He casually pulled out his wand -- a light brown wood -- and set it on the table between them. "Don't mess with me, Adrian."

Adrian in turn pulled out his own wand, concealed in an arm holster like Calum's own. The other boy's eyebrows rose in surprise at the holster, but seemed to take the sight of both wands on the table as a peace offering.

"Nice wand you got there," Calum noted, eyes filled with what Adrian now suspected was

kleptomania. The older boy's fingers were twitching noticeably. "Birch? No wait-- Hemlock?"

Calum guessed correctly.

Adrian had long since purchased an additional wand to his phoenix and holly. Apparently, his preferred wand was something of a 'sister core' and would one day be wanted by Dumbledore. Because of that, he'd been forced to get another wand: hemlock and dragon heartstring. It wasn't his first choice, but it would work well enough.

"Interesting thing, hemlock. I didn't think they sold that in Ollivanders." Calum grinned, obviously thinking he had somehow pinned down Adrian with his knowledge.

"They don't," Adrian openly admitted. "You also can't buy the majority of the books that you own in Diagon Alley."

Calum swallowed.

"You're in Ravenclaw," Adrian confirmed, leaning forward and linking his fingers together. How convenient it was to have sources able to look into the Ministry Archives for him. Adrian's smile grew. "You are rather studious. I assume you know plenty of things. Actually, I think you know things that are rather... *secretive.* "

"If you're talking about the books--" Calum started.

Adrian interrupted him with a raised hand, tilting his head as if he had heard something. He hummed, looking thoughtful. Adrien pointedly met Calum's eyes and smiled a knowing smile. "I'm sorry, I thought I'd heard a *rat.* "

Calum paled.

The compartment door slid open suddenly, showing two young children around his age. One had ridiculously bushy hair and her front teeth were slightly more prominent than normal. The other was pudgy and seemed overall nervous with the situation.

"Oh, *sorry* ," the girl said, though she didn't seem all that apologetic for having barged in. "Have you seen a toad? Neville's lost his."

The pudgy boy looked down, his cheeks flushed with embarrassment.

Adrian's eyes widened as he looked at the uncomfortable pudgy boy. He *did* faintly remember him. He had a horrid grandmother.

"No toad in here!" Calum exclaimed, snatching up his wand from the table. " *But* I'll help look. I'll get the Prefects to help out too. They owe me a few favours."

The bushy-haired girl seemed surprised but blushed slightly at the overwhelming assistance. "Thank you! I'm Hermione Granger--"

"Hadrianus Selwyn," Adrian interrupted, rising with a pleasant smile, sliding his wand back into its hidden holster. "What kind of toad are we looking for? I know quite a few magical creatures."

Neville pushed his way past and wrung his hands anxiously.

"He-- Trevor's about this big," Neville stumbled to explain, holding his hands apart a decent distance.

Adrian fought to keep the look on his face pleasant. He hadn't known the Longbottom heir would be so… *useless* .

"I'll go search!" Calum said, slipping out into the open hallway of the train. He obviously didn't want to be confronted on certain… issues.

Hermione frowned, looking at Adrian curiously. "I've heard the name Hadrianus before. Wasn't he a greek ruler?"

"Unfortunately yes. You can't choose the names your family gives you." He shrugged helplessly. "Call me Adrian. I insist."

Hermione offered a small, timid smile and nodded.

"I'll see you around?" She offered, seeming thrilled by the pleasant interaction.

Adrian nodded. Hermione and Neville left, once more leaving Adrian in silence. Briefly extracting his wand again, he wordlessly locked the compartment door, closing his eyes and leaning back against his seat.

Of course, the one time he could use Lutain and his uncanny ability to find every animal in question, the snake was sound asleep alongside the rest of the Hogwarts pets.

Adrian must've dozed off himself. When he woke up, it was dark outside and the train was slowing down. They'd arrived at Hogsmeade, it seemed. The station was barely more than an overhang on the side of the a hill. Between them and the large beautiful castle rising from the Scottish moore, a huge black glittering lake reflected the constellations above.

Adrian was loathe to admit it, but he found the sight exquisit.

"Firs' Years! This way!"

Adrian glanced over at the call where the smallest children were gathering near a man of truly towering proportions: the half-breed. Adrian had been warned about him repeatedly, by almost everyone. This was Hagrid, the groundskeeper for the castle and the nearby forests.

Adrian was shepherded along with other gaping, wide-eyed children to the lake, where a small fleet of wooden boats waited for them. Adrian's boat rocked precariously as he clambered in, threatening to tip him and the other three First Years into the inky black water. Probably they all did. Once the fleet of small boats were filled with every First Year, they were guided by invisible ropes, gliding smoothly and rhythmically over the surface towards the far side of the lake and Hogwarts.

Each boat had a glowing lantern, a single flame giving off enough light for Adrian to see a frightened brown-haired girl and a boy with false bravado in the boat with him. Off to the left, Adrian was fairly sure he had spotted the youngest Malfoy's white hair reflecting in the flickering lantern light.

Adrian's first proper look at Hogwarts left him speechless. The castle towered over the black lake, dozens of towers and ramparts giving him the impression of an impenetrable fortress, a fantastic closed-off world that he was now entering. Warm torchlight spilled from every window and doorway, reflecting off weathered stone and covered bridges, and made the school seem welcoming.

They piled out, forming a large mob as they were herded (very much like sheep) up along moving

staircases and past moving paintings.

The half-giant handed them off to a stern-looking Professor who told them to prepare for the Sorting, then disappeared beyond enormous doors. Then they were left alone in what looked like an entry hall.

Low mumbled conversations started to spread through the group, rumors and speculation for how the Sorting would proceed. Was Adrian the only one who knew that the Sorting was done by an ancient, floppy *hat*?

“I heard we have to battle a troll!” One boy bemoaned, looking nearly ready to faint.

‘*For Merlin’s sake...’* Adrian thought to himself, shifting restlessly as the crowd around him became ever more anxious. If Adrian was expected to be clueless, Bella had certainly raised him wrong.

When the door opened, the First Years echoed with gasps and sounds of astonishment as they looked around with wide-eyed glances. The ceiling of the Great Hall had been enchanted to resemble the night sky. It was brighter, deeper than anything Adrian had seen before and there wasn’t even a hint of light pollution or muggle contraptions.

All of the long tables cheered wildly at the sight of each of the First Years stumbling into the light. The chaos really began once the hat was brought out and that same strict-looking professor began to call out names.

“Abbot, Hannah!”

A blonde haired girl in pigtails ran forward, sitting down on the wobbly-looking stool. She looked absolutely terrified as the hat was lowered onto her head.

After a moment of quiet deliberation, the hat shouted, “Hufflepuff!”

“Bones, Susan!” went to Hufflepuff too. “Brown, Lavender!” went to Gryffindor. The names continued, eventually reaching the *fabled* name, “Potter, Skylar!”

At once the entire room was filled with a great hush, as if everyone had suddenly taken a deep breath and was now holding it until the boy in question was sorted. Skylar separated from the other First Years. He swaggered forward, confident and proud as he sat on the stool with his head held high. The hat was lowered and almost instantly it shouted the House: “Gryffindor!”

The red House went wild with cheers and applause. Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw joined in, though more subdued. Slytherin remained notedly silent.

“Like nobody saw that coming,” the girl standing next to Adrian muttered under her breath. He had only faintly heard her under the loud mantra of *“We got Potter!”* led by two frolicking twins. Adrian spared her a glance as the hall settled and the Sorting continued.

And then finally: “Selwyn, Hadrianus!”

Adrian was relieved that Bellatrix’s spell had worked on the roster. He squared his shoulders and strode across the room, his shoes clicking loudly while everyone watched him curiously. He noticed glares from the Gryffindor table, likely assuming he was related to the well-known dark family with the same name.

(In truth, it was so much worse but it was unlikely anyone would ever actually know that.)

He climbed onto the stool and tried to calmly wait for the hat to drop onto his head and obscure his vision. The moment it did, he felt something blast right through the pathetic strings that were his occlumency barriers.

'*My my*,' he heard an indescribable, masculine voice whisper. It seemed to pause for a moment, before continuing along the path with a destination unknown. *'I was under the assumption you had died*.'

Adrian's facial expressions twitched slightly. Thankfully, no-one would see with the hat over his eyes like it was. *'I did.'*

' *Well, If you would like to call it that I believe we could compromise. Harry Potter is dead* .'

Adrian felt a wave of satisfaction from the blunt confirmation.

The hat felt it and chuckled lowly in his head. ' *Of course, it is against my abilities to inform anyone of our exchange. A useful thing, ah yes, but you already know this. You thirst for more information, but you hold back* .'

Adrian neither confirmed nor denied the hat, simply awaiting its decision.

' *Ironic, isn't it, Mr. Riddle? Your entire situation, your life now... Your motivation and your goals, oh very cunning indeed... They may conflict with my own personal beliefs and judgement, although they are commendable. You show remarkable bravery, perhaps I should sort you into--* '

'Don't. Don't you dare,' Adrian threatened, trying to quell the rising wave of panic at such a prospect.

' *No no, of course not. It is humorous that your mind bears such resemblance to your father's.* '

' *I am nothing like Potter* .'

' *James Potter is not your father, Mr. Riddle. And because of this and the struggles you have overcome, it shall be--* '

"Slytherin!"

It took Adrian a moment to realise that this last part had been shouted out loud.

The tables clapped politely as Adrian stepped down and walked over to the table. Draco had cleared a spot for him nearest a girl with the surname Greengrass. He spotted Calum at the Ravenclaw table, looking inexplicably relieved.

The feast finished very quickly afterwards, the only announcement which stood out in Adrian's mind was Dumbledore's strange statement that the third floor corridor was out of bounds and only then to anybody who didn't want to suffer a very painful death.

At the end of the feast the large group that was Slytherin moved, rising and filtering out of the Great Hall before taking a sharp left to descend into the dungeons where apparently the Slytherin common room and dormitories were located.

The hallways were dark and muggy, the air stiflingly thick and almost too moist, the consequence of all that torchlight and the castle being so close to the lake no doubt. Adrian felt uncomfortably with the close quarters, yet almost as quickly as they pressed in they opened to more pleasant stone hallways, forking to the left and then to the right.

The Slytherin Prefects led the way, directing everyone to a specific lantern stand with a well engraved snake curled around the mount.

“Hello First Years,” The Seventh Year Prefect announced, looking very pleased with the selection. “This is the entryway to the Slytherin Common Rooms. The password is Dragon Eye. Keep updated, as the password will be changed by the end of the week.”

At the password, the snake shifted, wriggling free from the stone and working as a latch in itself. The wall around the torch fell and curled in on itself. It rolled, sliding out of the way with a silent flare of light. The Prefect ducked inside without waiting for the baffled First Years to get their bearings.

The room opened up into a large domed cavern. The ceiling was supported by archaic iron archways, the very very top was dark black, although it shifted ever so slightly with colour. Adrian assumed it was charmed like the great hall.

An older girl with short hair stepped forward. This was the other Seventh Year Prefect. “The rooms are divided by Years. Unlike the other Houses, we have *plenty* of individual bedrooms. Depending on your Year, your room is located in different hallways or locations. Each room generally has two students to it, however you can swap roommates at any time, just take your name plaque with you.” She pointed at the staircase alongside her own. The other instead of ascending, descended to a hallway lit by green torches. “First Years are down the stairs. Second and Third Years are to the right, Fourth and Fifth are to the left. Sixth and Seventh are up the stairs. Us Prefects are also up the stairs.”

“If House drama comes up,” The male Prefect took over. “*Don’t* fight it out outside of here. We’re Slytherin, I don’t *care* if you’re having problems. Outside of this room we stand together.”

He noticed a few First Years looking uncomfortable, and he wondered just who was already picking sides or trying to influence the Slytherin hierarchy.

“Good!” The female exclaimed, clapping suddenly and looking amused as everyone startled to attention. “Go find your rooms. Professor Snape, our Head of House will be here soon to discuss rules and other pertinent information.”

With that, they were dismissed and allowed to file down the narrow staircase, peering down, looking for their names among the silver name plaques.

That’s how Adrian found his room as well as the name of his roommate. He’d hoped for a single, but he wasn’t too worried; he knew at some point of time he could likely weed out the others and manage to get a room of his own. For now he just had to deal with whoever this stranger was.

“You’re Selwyn?” Another boy grunted, eying up Adrian critically. Adrian did the same, noticing the sharp, aristocratic features and the slanting eyes.

“And you must be Zabini.” Adrian nodded, looking at the boy who only wrinkled his nose slightly. Zabini would probably be popular for his appearance in the future, Adrian thought.

Zabini pushed past carefully and opened the room.

The room was… surprisingly *large* actually, very spacious. There was an open area immediately upon entering. From there, there was a two step lip along the left and right walls. On the elevated platform sat a pair of ordinary-looking beds and matching drawers were pressed flush to the back wall. Adrian spotted his black trunk as well as the ‘cage’ he had placed Lutain in at the end of one

of the beds.

Blaise Zabini went directly over to his things, opening his chest to look at its contents critically.

Adrian didn't bother, already he took out his wand. With an elaborate flourish, he pointed his wand at the set of drawers. "Rigaterim."

They expanded, sliding upwards and shifting into a double door wardrobe. He repeated the action with the single bed, turning it into a double.

"Exuo," he then muttered, watching with a small sense of satisfaction as his clothing removed itself from his trunk and slid into the wardrobe almost identical to how he preferred at his home.

Once he had everything set up and resting in an acceptable way, he glanced back to see how Blaise had set up his segment of the room. Somehow the other had managed to alter the colour of the walls into a tasteful shade of dark charcoal. It *was* more aesthetically pleasing compared to the shocking white on Adrian's side.

"You mind birds?" It didn't sound like a question.

Zabini reached into his own trunk, more exotic-looking than Adrian's, and somehow pulled an entire bird perch from the depths and set it up challengingly near a bedside table. Adrian frowned slightly, the bluntness of Zabini's action caught him off guard. He had a feeling that the boy would have ignored him even if he didn't want a bird in the room.

"Don't attack my snake," Adrian responded, his voice clipped. He pulled out the charmed box for Lutain before restoring it to normal size. The box rested easily under Adrian's bed.

He noticed how Blaise's eyes seemed to light up when Lutain slid out the first time. Evidently he had been expecting a smaller snake.

"Strix," Blaise offered once he pulled out a rather impressive black bird with red eyes. It looked far too delicate with feather crests and thin claws to partake in long flying like owls. It truly was just an exotic pet, one that looked far too composed for having been hiding in a trunk for hours.

"I hope it isn't an actual strix," Adrian jabbed. The appearance of Zabini's bird wasn't what an actual strix supposedly looked like. Blaise simply smiled thinly.

"Lutain," Adrian offered, watching as his familiar in question glanced around interestedly before trying to get into Adrian's trunk where he knew a couple stunned mice were stored.

Zabini gave a jerk of his head, and left his bird perched on its dark stand like it was a wall decoration. The bird looked at the snake with sightless eyes and Lutain hissed in retaliation.

Blaise didn't offer to accompany Adrian back to their common room. Instead the boy simply left, leaving Adrian a precious few moments alone.

"*How was the train?*" Adrian smiled, stroking down the smooth scales of his companion's back.

"*Terrible!*" Lutain hissed, seeming very upset. "*It was dark and loud with many hisses! Not good!*"

Adrian shrugged, it would be the easiest way to smuggle Lutain into the school. Although considering Blaise also had a pet that evidently broke the school rules, he figured most of the Slytherins ignored the rule anyways.

" *You'll enjoy it here much more. I don't think the others will find it too odd for a snake to be in the common room. Just don't bite anyone."*

Lutain managed to somehow look affronted, " *I am not vermin-brain.* "

Adrain chuckled lowly, allowing Lutain to slide up and over his robes. Lutain nestled into his usual position, looping around his neck and upper right arm.

Adrian turned, exiting his room and ascending the stairs where the rest of his Year had already gathered under the direction of the two Prefects.

"Welcome all, to Slytherin," the boy started. "My name is Terence, that is Vaisley. We are your Prefects for this year. That means if any of you have questions or problems with the other Houses come to us or our head of House, Professor Snape."

"Let's get this in the open," Vaisley chimed in, her expression falling into something serious. "Some of us come from more… reputable families, but we are all in *this* House now. We stick together and present a unified front. There will be no insulting each other for *whatever* reason outside these walls. No-one in the other Houses will make the distinction between if you are or aren't dark. And for Merlin's sake, *don't* attack the Gryffindor's alone."

Vaisley had the proper amount of exasperation in her tone to imply that such a thing had occurred before.

"Everyone in this House has strengths and weaknesses. We don't care if you're good at charms or rubbish at astronomy, if you need help, you *get help.* We don't tolerate laziness, or poor marks," Terence stated bluntly. "Most upper Years are decent at healing charms. Ask one of us for help before going to the infirmary and making a scene."

Vaisley sat herself down on one of the dark leather chairs, pulling out a rolled up scroll from in her pocket and produced a quill. "Alright you lot, I'm assuming most of you brought either something illegal or something not directly permitted by the school rules. Thankfully, the Slytherin rooms have their *own* set of wards-- once you're older you can place whatever wards you want on your room itself. Or pay someone to do it for you. How many of you brought pets?"

Adrian grudgingly lifted his arm, alongside a decent portion of the incoming students. "It's fine. If something goes missing it's your responsibility. If anyone gets injured from it, it's your responsibility. You feed it, you control it, you keep it."

Lutain twitched and peered around the room curiously. Adrian spotted Draco staring at Lutain in slight disbelief.

The rest of the meeting continued rather blandly. At one point their Head of House stopped in. He was a tall man with pale skin and greasy hair. He had a large hooked nose and what seemed like a permanent sneer. He didn't seem that interested or enthusiastic for the year, but once again did reinforce the concept that the older Years were the ones to go to if they had need.

The First Years were directed to a bulletin board on the opposite side of the open common room. The board was split into multiple sections, some scrolls were pinned up advertising events or tournaments likely to occur on a weekend. Adrian learned that this was where students sometimes posted questions that they needed answered, as well as services or goods that they were willing to sell. He also spotted a bright red flier, boldly forbidding the breeding and sale of pets to one another.

The rest of the night was spent with an open question-and-answer session. Most of the questions were asinine and if anything, proved who were lacking the proper intelligence. (A lumbering duo stuck close to Malfoy, they seemed to have half of anyone's intelligence held collectively between them.)

Adrian instead opted to return to his room. He started attempting to construct the few wards he knew, simple things he had tried to create once moving into the Lestrange household. Having some forewarning when someone was outside his door gave him precious moments to prepare for whatever rabid attack Bellatrix conjured.

Adrian linked the ward to a small glass ball he brought with him, alongside a leather bracelet. It would last for now, but later on, once he actually knew and studied more wards, he would be able to make something longer lasting. A silencing ward was also constructed; he didn't want to have to hear all of Zabini's bird's chirping titters.

He wasn't exactly *pleased* to have to share his room. It was tolerable, but he'd have to establish some sort of set rules with Zabini. If he was lucky, he could perhaps bargain the boy into shifting to another room. The boy, Nott, seemed rather awkward but held potential.

Adrian smiled to himself. It was going to be an interesting year.

Eminence

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian writes an essay, knows about a phoenix, and burns an essay

Chapter Notes

The spell Peddlemus is Latin accurate.
The spell was more popular in older times, where it was used between informants or merchants. The spell evaluates the worth or value of an offered task, object, or information and assures the caster that at a time of the caster's choosing, something of equal value or worth is returned.
An example would be between a merchant selling a good to a customer who does not have proper coinage. Once the spell is used, the merchant would be assured that eventually the customer would exchange something of equal coinage to 'pay off' the debt.

Adrian glanced upwards over the cover of the book he was reading. He'd quickly fallen into something of a routine. It was a relaxed Wednesday afternoon. Having just finished his Charms class that morning, he was lounging comfortably in the Hogwarts Library until dinner.

His makeshift schedule allowed him plenty of time to work on the Herbology essay he had been assigned painfully early that morning. Despite the post waking daze that accompanied the greenhouses, it was purely coincidental his inherent knack for magical creatures somehow related to his understanding of magical flora. Adrian was almost certain the marks of many of his classmates rested in his gloved hands.

He had taken the only book in the library relating to the pertinent topic of his essay: the use of Arnica outside of poison brewing. His book listed, in rather impressive detail, that Arnica was still used as a herbal treatment for bruises and sprains on humans.

"Er, hello."

Adrian jolted, nearly knocking his inkwell from the armrest of the chair. The book slid from his lap, snapping shut as it landed on the floor amidst the flurry of his papers. Reflexively, he scrambled to catch the book, already aware that it was futile.

Adrian had assumed that he would be the first person in the library with the intent of finishing the homework. The chances that he would encounter anyone with the same mindset was low, especially considering it was assigned just that morning.

The girl who had startled him so terrible stepped out from around a bookshelf. Her eyes were wide with guilt, Adrian was embarrassed -- had he become so relaxed at Hogwarts he could be caught off guard by a *girl?*

“I was wondering if you were--”

“Are you planning on working on the herbology essay?” Adrian abruptly offered, trying to smooth the situation the best he could. He leant down from his chair, hoisting the tome off the floor.

“I’m sorry,” the girl apologized, looking frazzled. She looked ready to bolt, yet something about her was familiar.

She had unruly hair and a hideously bright red scarf which only served to make her skin colour seem that much more untasteful.

“Oh, we’ve met! One the train!” She enthusiastically blurted, blushing once she realized her outburst. She scowled, looking disgruntled, a thought occurring to her perhaps. “It’s a shame we aren’t in the same house, Hadrianus.”

Adrian felt disgruntled at her unintentional jab at Slytherin. “I could say the same. Gryffindor, is… unfortunate.”

She didn’t deny it, which likely meant that the other girls had realized how snobby she was.

“Sit down, I’ll share the book with you,” Adrian offered, pointing to the seat next to him, currently being used by Adrian’s bag. She blushed once again before shuffling over and dropping her own heavy bag on the floor next to him. She sat heavily onto the chair once it was cleared, and wasted no time pulling out her plethora of books and parchment. Adrian raised one eyebrow when he noticed she had already been writing the essay, even without the book she wanted.

“I like to get my assignments done in advance,” she struggled to explain, seeming nervous in his company.

“As do I,” Adrian soothed, showing how nearly complete his assignment was already. She gaped in surprise and gave a genuine smile before hiding her face in her hair.

They continued, eventually finishing their essays once able to bounce information back and forth. Hermione (her name had finally come to him while writing) *was* rather intelligent; it was a shame she felt the urge to flaunt it so obviously.

“Could you help me with essays again sometime?” She asked, eyes wide and watery with how hopeful she was.

Adrian was suddenly struck with the situation and just how *perfect* it was.

“Of course,” he nearly purred, trying to keep the grin threatening to split his face absent. “But I make deals.”

Hermione paused, suddenly rather timid. “Deals?”

Adrian briefly wondered if he was acting as slimy as Calum. He nodded politely, “Exactly. In the Slytherin house, it’s common to have some sort of... *assurance.* Some classmates like to take advantage of you.”

Hermione nodded eagerly, clearly sympathizing with him. Adrian took it as a sign to continue.

“Deals are essentially promises. I’ll help you, and you’ll help me in the future. Of course, I would always accept galleons if you’re purchasing something I own.” He smiled slowly, trying to persuade her gently. He could tell that the girl was relaxing. “But in this case, it’s so I’ll help you

again sometime."

Hermione was still wary but it looked like she was considering the offer, now that he had explained it. She worried her lower lip with her prominent front teeth. When she spoke, her words were careful and considered. "Well, that *would* be nice."

Adrian smiled and pulled out his wand. He motioned for her to touch the opposite end of his wand, forming a link between them.

In a clear calm voice, Adrian incanted, "Peddlemus."

His wand warmed under his hand. Hermione twitched slightly, clearly feeling the warmth on her end. It lingered, before slowly fading.

"There," Adrian said, smiling. He pulled his wand back and slid it into his holster.

Hermione smiled and she looked much happier. Adrian assumed it was because now he was forced to spend time in her presence.

He almost felt bad for her.

"Incorrect!"

Although he was sitting on the far side of the room and the words hadn't been directed towards him, Adrian flinched. The boisterous tone of voice was seriously messing on his head.

Defence Against the Dark Arts was being taught by the most insufferable man Adrian had ever the misfortune of meeting once again. James Potter looked practically *gleeful* as he took five more points from the stunned looking Pansy Parkinson.

The Hufflepuffs weren't exactly sure what to do. It was blatantly obvious that *Professor* Potter was trying to take as many points as possible from the Slytherins and was enjoying every second of his success.

It was grating on Adrian's nerves. Each jab was making him tense, until only a few more sneers and dumb looks from Hufflepuff until he snapped.

Adrian was filled with intense loathing as James Potter once *again* asked a question to the unprepared Daphne Greengrass. She stuttered but it was too late, already Potter was snatching points.

Was Potter even *qualified* for teaching? Wasn't he an Auror?

"Mr. Malfoy!" James Potter started once more, voice crooning in contrast to the huge shark like grin spreading across his features. "What is a Daywalker!"

' *Oh!* ' Adrian felt attention perking up, the questions were venturing into magical creatures? Now *this* was a topic he knew.

"A Daywalker is a species of vampire that is impervious to sunlight," Malfoy responded, each word grinding from his locked jaw. Malfoy had been the prime target of Potter throughout the entire (much too long) class already.

It was a well known fact that Draco's father only narrowly escaped being sentenced to Azkaban. With how involved Potter was with the arrests, he could have been the one who escorted the man to his trial.

"Five points from Slytherin for stating the obvious!" Potter was nearly vibrating with excitement, "The proper answer would include the description of its fangs and eyes!"

Oh this was getting *ridiculous.*

"Mr. Selwyn!" James Potter directed, shifting from where he stood on his little platform to look at Adrian directly.

Adrian froze and with restrained trembling he met the soft brown eyes. Chillingly acidic green scalded and seared into James with emotion so strong, it stunned the man for a few seconds.

"Do phoenixes die?" Stumbling, James Potter asked.

Adrian almost smiled.

"Yes, phoenixes can die."

"Incorrec-"

"I apologize professor. Would you like me to specify *how* they die? I don't like to presume such things, but if that was the case, your question shouldn't have been so direct." Adrian interrupted, he revelled in the almost euphoric sensation of a shocked James Potter.

"Elaborate," James Potter demanded. The man crossed his arms, choosing to lean against his personal desk in the relaxed picture of teacher authority.

"A phoenix can die from its bond with its master if the bond is strong enough and the master dies. It can also die from neglect or abuse. That is only with tamed birds, since the majority of phoenixes are still wild. The bird can also die on command, if it ever wants. Curses will not harm a phoenix, instead it'll revert back into its hatchling state. Specific venoms from its natural predator will kill it, alongside a few species of plants."

The room was silent, Adrian curling his hands tightly into fists. He felt the biting sting of his nails puncturing the skin of his palms, but didn't back down from Potter.

The rising nagging thoughts rose slowly in the back of his mind, regardless of his attempts to crush them. The ravenous doubt that left him inexplicably desiring affection from his-- ' *No! James Potter is not my father!'*

His teeth began grinding together, the ache in his jaw providing clarity to dismiss the nonsense.

'He's not even that good of a teacher. I bet he spoils the Gryffindors for holding a quill. He spoils Skylar. Why didn't he sp-'

He almost screamed with fury, he could tell his entire body was shaking ever so slightly. His face was aching.

The little bell on James Potter desk rang itself. Potter blinked, somehow still stunned and staring at Adrian almost hypnotized. He floundered, not actually saying anything while everyone gathered their objects and filed out of the room.

The group walked silently back to the common room. Once the door opened and they walked in quietly, the older years looked at the new students slightly interested.

Then Pansy burst into cheers and hugged Adrian, who yelped backwards in surprise.

“Selwyn got Potter!” Theo cheered, seeming smug through Adrian’s own abilities.

“The golden boy brat?” One of the third years asked curiously, not too interested with the ruckus.

“No, the professor.” Pansy clarified, looking much too starry eyed for Adrian’s comfort.

“Bloody hell, how did you manage that?” A fifth year gasped, looking at Adrian interestedly. “That clotpole won’t even give Vaisley five points.”

Draco seemed rather annoyed with the topic, and stomped away to sit on a vacant couch.

“You should have seen it, answered the question and shut him right up.” Theo grinned, giving Adrian an appreciative look. “You’re going to be useful when Quidditch season comes around!”

“Always happy to be of service.” Adrian sighed, trying to slip away from the new interest from the upper years.

It wasn’t *that* big of a deal.

Adrian noticed afterwards on the house cup record in the Slytherin common room, he had been awarded ten points by Professor Potter.

The dynamics of the Slytherin house were confusing and convoluted. Each Year apparently had some sort of hierarchy established. The older you were, the greater your inherent right to order those younger than you around was. It was particularly aggravating when a fifth year openly told you to fetch them useless objects or food.

It reminded Adrian all too well of the lazy *pigs* which treated him similarly.

It was even *more* loathsome when power-plays began just before the end of October.

A heavy set girl, twice the size of Daphne Greengrass, a fair haired snobbish First Year, had gotten it into her head that *she* was the superior authority of the Year. She hadn’t any qualms with Draco, who had almost instinctively claimed his high position. Instead, this stocky large jawed doberman challenged Adrian.

Theo had snickered to himself, looking interested while fidgeting. Watching Adrian and Millicent (as he had been later informed) battle it out was something of a train wreck.

She first demanded Adrian move his position from where he sat on the couch. He lazily obliged, having offered a long mocking swoop of his arm which undermined the fact he actually had moved. The next act was having snatched the food from his plate before he could even eat. He instead smiled and sipped on whatever drink the house elves had provided. He hadn’t touched any part of his meal, instead offering it to Crabbe who eagerly snatched up the spare biscuit.

Millicent started to throw jabs, vicious spittle coated words which weren’t at all pestering considering how petty they truly were. By now, a week had gone on and Millicent had not gained any ground, although she hadn’t lost any either.

Millicent had cornered him in the common room one friday evening. Adrian was reading through a book rather quickly in search of an answer for a Hufflepuff girl who was likely going to fail her assignment without his aid. Millicent plopped onto the couch across from him, wearing a smug look more at home on a pug.

" *So,* I was looking at tapestries," She started, already almost crowing with victory. "And you aren't part of the Selwyn family!"

Adrian blinked, paused, then nearly groaned.

"No, I'm not," he agreed, speaking slowly with the rising tension of the room.

"I'm from another one. Selwyn *is* a popular last name, you know."

"You aren't in *any* of them!" She cheered, grin looking positively vicious. "That means you're adopted!"

Adrian paused, calmly turned the page of his book, withheld the flinch, and raised an eyebrow.

"I bet your real parents don't even like you," Millicent nearly giggled. "I bet you're from a pathetic family! Maybe even Longbottom!" She was full out laughing now, drawing the attention of a few other students. "I bet they got rid of you so they wouldn't have to ever see your ugly mug again!"

Adrian didn't notice how tight his grip was on his book until he heard a nearly inaudible creaking noise. He glanced downwards at his book. The corners of the pages he had been reading furled inwards on itself, like watching a flower close bloom in reverse.

The room was struck with the pungent smell of smoke, and a few wafts trailed upwards from his hands.

Millicent didn't seem to notice, although a few of the upper years murmured to one another. They evidently had seen the smoke and now understood the cause was the steadily intensifying anger.

Millicent finally noticed that she had gained something over Adrian. She beamed, looking thoroughly impressed with herself. She walked away with her head held high.

Theo had seen the exchange, and seemed conflicted with the results.

The next day in Herbology, the teacher, Professor Sprout, had the idea to introduce the group as well as the Ravenclaws to a dangerous thorny plant with bright red flowers capable of breathing fire.

The plant in question was fascinating, although the name escaped Adrian. It thrashed and smoldered and provided a *delicious* opportunity.

Theo had chanced looking upwards with a grimace from where he was trying to prune his own plant. Adrian, standing across from him with his own plant, had a nearly obsessive look on his face as he stared down the row at Millicent.

Theo watched, tilting his head curiously as before his eyes, Adrian's hands flexed slightly and his pupils dilated rather suddenly.

Millicent screamed almost instantly after. Theo spun his head to look at her, where her hair and her robes had caught marvelous lapping flames. She was crying, thick alligator tears falling down her face while the air was filled with the acrid stench of burning hair.

Professor Sprout hurried down the row, scolding the others of the dangers of the flower. She hushed Millicent and took her aside, patting out the very eager flames with her fire retardant gloves.

Theo slowly looked back at Adrian, who *finally* blinked and looked away. He calmly tended to his plant over the sounds of Millicent's whimpers.

Theo was extra twitchy, stumbling over to mumble his speculations to Pansy who had shrieked in delight over the rumor. She spread it rapidly, efficiently enough that by dinner that night it was a Slytherin secret that Adrian Selwyn could set things aflame, *wandlessly* and *nonverbally.*

When Millicent was released from the hospital wing a few days later, it wasn't only a stack of homework assignments awaiting her.

Adrian smiled at her when she returned, offering a pleasent, "So glad to see you weren't burnt too badly."

She realized when her half finished essay curled and burned under her hands, that the injury was entirely intentional.

By the end of that week, Adrian had secured his position as untouchable.

Troll

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian spots a Thestral, gets punched in the face, and attacks a troll.

Chapter Notes

I know it's been a painfully long wait, I hope that this next chapter will help.
I read every comment posted, as well as the kudos count everyday. Thank you for your words and the time to kudos my story, it helps me write and fuels me knowing that fans anticipate the next chapter.

Adrian had mixed feelings over Halloween. It was the day of the pagan Samhain festival, something Adrian enjoyed quite thoroughly. On that day, it was custom to honor the dead, or the names of your ancestors. Although awkward and uncomfortable, it was an apparent honor to stumble through the names of your ancestors, tracing your lineage back as far as you could. Adrian could certainly understand why reciting his lineage, the descendants of Salazar Slytherin, would be a privilege .

On the other hand, the night was repeatedly marked with the foreign high pitch hiss of *'Show the boy his place!'* and Bellatrix unhinged like a mad hound. She was entirely a different person, the concepts of comfort or maternal instinct absent from her cackling and vicious curses.

Adrian had shouted, he had *begged--*

He twitched, fingers sliding towards a phantom ache of something wriggling in his abdomen. His sudden movement jarred the book which had been balanced lazily on his lap.

Draco looked up sharply, following the book with a pinched look of annoyance. His elaborate albino peacock quill stopped scratching against his parchment.

“What, is that book too boring for your *prestigious* tastes?” Draco asked, looking challengingly at Adrian. It was no lie that Adrian was very particular about his books, that he was very critical of them.

“Says the one holding a peacock quill,” Adrian snipped back, without much feeling.

Draco only scowled, looking back at the book of charms and jinxes not taught in the Hogwarts curriculum.

“I hope you’re not planning on using that on Bulstrode,” Draco warned, not flinching at Adrian’s glare.

“I did *nothing* to that girl--”

Draco looked at him with obvious skepticism.

“It’s for a bargain, a second year Slytherin wants a hex that is unique enough to do damage, but tricky enough not to be fixed quickly.” Adrian explained, “Three galleons on it.”

“So now you’re selling your services too?” Draco rolled his eyes. His tone made it clear he thought the idea of Adrian selling his services was beneath him. “Give you a sickle and you’ll jinx Potter for me?”

“I’d need more than a sickle if you want me to hunt down a professor,” Adrian grunted, flipping to a specific page before turning and showing Draco the desired hex.

Draco read it, eyes widening in surprise at the description, “The Jelly-finger hex?”

“Makes your target unable to hold anything in their hands, not taught in schools, and has a potion to reverse the effects. Which takes two days to brew,” Adrian deadpanned, the wicked gleam in his eyes belying his even tone. “Pretty useful.”

Draco paused. “What was the incantation for that--”

Adrian snapped the book shut, sliding it into his bag with a blank expression. He looked at Draco and dryly informed the blonde that the information would cost him three galleons. Draco scowled again.

But he paid Adrian anyway.

The Slytherin first year boys shuffled into the great hall in quest for lunch. The hall was nearly vacant, people tried to stay away since it was in the process of being decorated for the feast later in the day.

“What charms do you reckon they use?” Blaise muttered, just loud enough for the group to hear. Adrian peered up and over, seeing a large pumpkin getting dragged across the floor between the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables.

He opened his mouth once Theo looked at him expectantly, the pumpkin turned and Adrian froze alongside Theo.

“None,” Adrian breathed, resisting the urge to walk over to the creatures.

“We’re used to him acting all mysterious, but what’s gotten into *you?”* Draco drawled, looking pointedly at Theo who spluttered, eyes never leaving the creatures.

Theo could see Thestrals?

“It’s nothing!” Theo snapped, his voice a bit higher than normal. He was fidgeting and looked aggravated.

Adrian had to agree. It would be suspicious as to why a first year would be able to see an omen of death so clearly.

Thestrals were absolutely *beautiful.*

Adrian found himself sneaking peeks towards the animals any time he could as he helped himself to the recently harvested vegetables and fruits. The apples were just ripe. He bit into one with a satisfying crunch while he watched the winged horses help tug another pumpkin into position.

They stumbled out of the great hall, Adrian heading off to snatch Lutain from where he lay dozing back in Adrian's room (casting a glare at Strix when the bird tried to snap at his fingers), and headed to the library.

He almost bumped into a crying Hermione, who was too upset to see who she had actually run past. Adrian blinked in surprise, but decided it was best to ignore her and headed to the library to read.

He was reading for pleasure, listening absently as Lutain rattled off what Adrian had missed in the time he had been gone. The Slytherin boy paused, listening as Lutain described how Blaise had very cautiously hidden what seemed to be a suspicious book into a locked trunk. The info wasn't surprising, considering how Blaise had actively smuggled a *live animal* into Hogwarts. The ramifications were alarming, if Blaise unfortunately was caught with the book, assuming it *was* illegal, he could easily blame it on Adrian. Adrian also had to wonder why Lutain, a snake barely able to articulate, considered a book 'suspicious'.

"And you saw all of this?" Adrian murmured under his breath. His focus was now entirely on his companion.

"*Yes!*" Lutain crowed. He was just as frustrated by the Strix as Adrian was. "*He speaks word cotello.*"

"Cotello?" Adrian repeated in English, just to make sure the translation hadn't changed the word.

Lutain hissed excitedly, causing Adrian to smile and slide the book back on the shelf. He already knew all the spells in that specific book anyway.

He left the room, scanning through the courtyards and only nodding his acknowledgement to fellow Slytherins who briefly stated his name. Word had started to spread outside to the other houses that he had wordless magic. As had the rumors of his bargain.

He hadn't been approached by Calum, which was in itself surprising.

"Selwyn!"

Adrian stopped, glancing over his shoulder and mentally cursing when he saw a stocky and aggressive Hufflepuff approaching him from down the hallway.

"Yes, Macmillan?"

"What's this I hear about you making an oath with Susan!" The blond-haired Hufflepuff hissed, looking absolutely furious.

"I don't make *oaths,"* Adrian corrected, his tone making it clear that he didn't like how the Hufflepuff was asserting himself. The blond-haired boy was acting far too similar to another boy Adrian once knew.

"Then what do you call that thing you made with her!"

"I make *bargains."*

"Yeah, like your *slimy* snake." Macmillan growled angrily, whipping out his wand to hold under Adrian's chin.

Lutain reared, looking threatening with his fangs unhinged. Lutain had grown, eyes bright and

scales glossy in the October light.

Macmillan didn't falter, which was in itself surprising.

"I bet you're plotting something evil," Macmillan said. "That's all you pathetic lot do!"

"I suggest you lower your wand. You're making a scene," Adrian reprimanded sharply. "Not that I think you know any worthwhile spells to begin with."

"You're right," Macmillan agreed all too quickly. Surprisingly the Hufflepuff lowered his wand. Before Adrian could react, Macmillan pulled back his fist and clobbered the Slytherin.

Adrian's head recoiled back. Macmillan had hit his nose. It was bleeding slightly, which had Lutain rearing, thoroughly angered.

"*You badger den weasel! Your fur is sour and dirt!*" Lutain hissed.

Something about Lutain's insults and the throbbing pulse in Adrian's face brought a rising tug of *something* to a crescendo.

He imagined Bellatrix's laughter over it all.

Adrian giggled, reaching up with one hand to staunch the bleeding the best he could. He went cross eyed, trying to stare at his nose. His one eye was already straining to do so with the darkening marks of a bruise.

Adrian's face shifted, unhinging to look relaxed with a bright excited smile parting his lips and getting him giddy.

Macmillan looked stunned, not actually expecting to do any damage. Adrian's eye hurt and the skin felt pulsating warm. It was a familiar sensation, hadn't Bella always told me that second blood was always justifiable.

"*Master?*" Lutain asked, his voice low and soothing. Adrian ignored him.

"An eye for an eye," Adrian said, grinning. He tasted blood. His teeth tinged pink.

Why wasn't Macmillan finding it funny as well?

"What-- I-- I didn't--" Macmillan stuttered, and Adrian's eyes dilated and his knuckle popped.

Adrian felt the exhilarating *rush* as his blood and magic beckoned to a call he didn't know yet. There was something distinctly satisfying watching Macmillan's eyes bulge as it undoubtedly struck him.

Macmillan gagged, retching with both hands moving to his mouth. With almost exaggerated slowness, Macmillan pulled away a hand from his bleeding mouth. He was holding the lower segment of a cracked tooth.

"A bargain is a bargain." Adrian announced, looking at Macmillan through the latter's horrified gaze, "Next time you try something, you know what to expect."

One of the Slytherin upper years healed Adrian's black eye efficiently with lingering curiosity. She

knew who she was, likely one of the few upper years who actually believed him too.

His eye was healed, his nose fixed, and just in time for the Halloween feast.

He walked with Theo, who had gotten rather attached to Adrian as of recent. Likely because even Theo was smart enough to recognize, with his family being a predominantly dark family, that having a strong ally was important.

Theo took his seat next to Adrian, Draco sitting on his other side. Across from them sat Crabbe and Goyle, with Pansy next to them. Daphne and Millicent were further down the table, trying to avoid them as best they could.

Draco scoffed when a group of bats swept close to the Hufflepuffs and they squealed.

“A bunch of sheep they are,” Draco muttered, trying to ignore Pansy’s barking laughter.

“It’s a bad design” Theo sniped, snatching an apple from a nearby bowl. “All the houses get good traits except that bunch,”

“I think I get it, the Hufflepuffs are too loyal for their own part,” Blaise murmured, taking the seat on the far side of Theo. “Too loyal to a single person.”

Adrian snorted quietly, remembering just earlier that day.

“ *Speaking* of Hufflepuff, I heard a Hufflepuff boy was in the hospital wing earlier,” Daphne said, sliding over and leaning into Pansy to address the group. Her eyes were silvery sharp, “Something to do with you, Selwyn?”

Adrian looked at her blankly.

“You sent a boy to the hospital wing?” Draco drawled. The ‘ *again?’* was implied and everyone knew it.

Adrian reached for a roll, opening it and spreading some apple butter on the inside. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“I *also* heard that Maricia Holdwyn had to heal a black eye,” Daphne added, holding a slightly tilted smile. “Seems whoever it was got a good hit in.”

Adrian felt a small inkling of anger. Was Daphne now challenging him as well?

Draco looked pointedly at Adrian, who was calmly looking at Daphne. Adrian shook his head dismissively, saying, “I heard the Hufflepuff boy is missing a few teeth. I wonder why, when he had no bruises.”

Daphne backed down, suddenly more interested in the food on her plate. The others seemed to become a bit more interested in their own meals too. They all knew that they hadn’t learned any hexes to remove teeth.

“Adrian?” Theo muttered under his breath, taking a large slice of moist turkey. Adrian glanced sideways, seeing his slightly sheepish expression. The conversation topics had changed, everyone was involved with their own debates at the moment.

“Yes, Nott?” Adrian sighed, turning to face the thin blonde hair boy more directly. Adrian’s use of his surname seemed to heighten his anxiety.

“What were the uh, the things?” Theo started, shifting uncomfortably. “That the other people couldn't see?”

“Thestrals,” Adrian answered, glancing through the hall where a Thestral was sleeping near the large pumpkin. It was likely staying for the feast and then would help tug the pumpkins out. “They’re omens of death.”

Theo inhaled sharply.

“A Thestral is the exact opposite of a unicorn, or a pegasus. Nobody knows how they breed, or how they’re born. They’re classified as dark creatures by the Ministry.” Adrian smiled and met Theo’s surprised and wondering eyes. “Only people who have witnessed death firsthand can see a Thestral. Isn’t that right, Nott?”

Theo flinched almost instantly.

“*Master!*” Adrian stopped and looked past Nott towards the great doors which were propped open. He thought he spotted his dark friend moving quickly over the floor towards the Slytherin table. *“Master! You must flee!”*

Theo was looking at him too suspiciously to risk speaking to Lutain. Instead Adrian craned his head, peering over and searching for Lutain’s approaching form.

“Selwyn? What is it?” Draco asked, looking over in search of what he saw.

Adrian dropped his arm, finally seeing Lutain slithering over the floor in the torchlight. A few murmurs went up and down the table, a few upper years noticing the snake.

“What’s that thing want now?” Blaise muttered, meeting Adrian’s eye. Blaise knew that Adrian often left the door open just enough for his friend.

“Master, a large creature is in the hallways. A large creature! Bumbling and clumsy like a tree!” Lutain snapped, quickly sliding up Adrian’s arm and over his shoulder. Lutain had grown, he was starting to weigh like heavy rope.

“He doesn’t normally come here unless there's something wrong,” Adrian mused, rubbing Lutain’s face.

“A large creature big as tree! Heavy stick. Stench! Masked human pop and it was there! In dark den!”

As large as a tree? Humanoid and with a heavy stick-

Adrian tensed and was instantly confused: how had a *troll* been snuck into the castle?

“There must be something in the dungeons,” Adrian spoke, loud enough for everyone to hear, “Something which is dangerous.”

He heard Pansy scoff.

The great doors were swung open even further as a panting James Potter ran into the hall, face serious and not at all pausing for breath.

“Troll!” He shouted, using his wand to amplify his voice. “Troll in the dungeons! Prefects, get your students under control and escort them back to the common rooms!”

Skylar immediately jumped and ran down, he raced up to his dad who had cut the amplification spell.

With a sinking feeling, Adrian scanned the Gryffindor table as the hall erupted in screams. Where was Hermione?

Adrian ducked his head close to Lutain and whispered under the shouts, *"Did you smell anyone else in the dungeons?"*

"Yes, in a water room. Hard with stench. Scent female."

Hermione was in a toilet in the dungeons? There was an abandoned girls room a few hallways over from the Slytherin common room access; it wouldn't be that big of a stretch to assume she had hidden from the Gryffindors there.

Adrian stood and slid off the bench, the rest of the students followed his lead. Vaisley and Terence jumped at the chance and started to direct everyone through the halls and down the staircases towards the dungeons.

Lutain took his time scenting the air, glancing around and searching for the troll. Adrian heard no words and smoothly stepped out of the way, ducking behind a suit of armor. The rest of the group filed past quickly, leaving him alone in the hallway only moments later.

"Alright Lutain, can you keep your eyes open for the troll? I'll find the girl." Adrian muttered, turning to sharply run down the hallway.

He mentally cursed the loud clicking his shoes made, the sound echoing and distorting surreally. Lutain hissed in surprise when Adrian twisted around one corner, looking frantically for the washroom entrance. The hairs on his arms were standing in the near darkness of the hallway, and the looming threat that a troll was loose anywhere.

He barged through the door, instantly hearing quiet sobs.

"Hermione," Adrian bluntly stated, locking the door behind him and moving to the stalls. The sobbing abruptly cut off.

"Adrian?" Hermione asked, voice uplifting hopefully. She opened one of the stalls, her eyes red and puffy, "What are you--"

"We don't have time," Adrian interrupted, grabbing her arm forcefully. He ignored how Hermione paled once seeing Lutain up close for the first time. "There's a troll loose in the castle, mountain troll I think, although It could be a oak troll. Stick close, I'll get you back to the hallways."

Hermione floundered at the surplus of unexpected information. Both of them froze in sync as the door Adrian had purposefully locked shut, creaked open.

"Master! It stench!" Lutain hissed, pulling a protective stance.

"Back!" Adrian urged, pushing Hermione back against the stall as the two slipped inside. They could hear the heavy footfalls as the troll lumbered into the room, dull echo thumps as it knocked its head against the torch sconces and the ceiling.

Adrian pulled out his wand, ignoring Hermione's frantic hand gestures to do the opposite. He peered around the corner, spotting the dumb looking troll who was poking a mirror in confusion. It was a mountain troll after all.

“Bite? Bite?” Lutain enthused, flexing eagerly in anticipation.

“When I say, run.” Adrian whispered, before turning and waltzing out entirely.

The troll noticed him immediately, it grunted and hefted the large wooden club up above its head threateningly. It bellowed angrily and Adrian slowly lifted his wand. Without warning, it brought the club down hard.

“Incendio.” Adrian murmured, the club burning instantly, scorching the troll’s hands. It stupidly dropped the club, the heavy burning wood glancing off its right shoulder.

The troll cried out loudly, clutching its shoulder and sobbing at the blisters on its palms. Adrian snatched Hermione by the arm, throwing her past the troll.

She screamed, running around the troll and out the busted door, Adrian followed quickly. He had been trained to run fast, normally sharp curses being cast behind him. There was a sort of terrifying adrenaline which pulsated through his blood. He knew instantly that this troll was more dangerous than anything Bella had thrown at him; with Bella he had the assurance of counterspells and healing potions.

“It’s coming!” Hermione screamed, tears running down her face.

Adrian pointed his wand over his shoulder without looking. “Avis!”

A small flock of canaries shot out of Adrian’s wand. Hermione rounded a corner just ahead. Adrian rounded the same corner, scrambling in surprise when a suit of armor was levitating above his head.

The troll stumbled past, and the suit of armor dropped onto the creature. The collective weight of the metal plates and chainmail weighed heavily and knocked the troll unconscious.

Adrian breathed heavily to catch his breath, Hermione had a breathless smile, looking at Adrian thankfully.

“Get back to your common room, avoid the teachers,” Adrian panted, giving a sharp nod before running off to the hallway perpendicular.

Adrian grinned as he slipped into the common room without eve **r** seeing a single teacher.

Such a shame that Snape was halfway through a word, addressing the Slytherin house, when Adrian managed to slide in.

Epithet

Chapter Summary

Where Hermione begins to get desperate, Adrian rejects Draco, sees Calum, and starts to run out of time.

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year!
Anyways, I was intending to post this for Christmas but you know how hectic this season gets.
This chapter is Un-beta'd in an attempt to throw you all something to gnaw on.
Best wishes for 2017

Sirius Black, a sector head Auror as well as James Potter's close friend, along with Lily Potter, a specialist in wards and charms, marched into Hogwarts the day after the troll was secured.

The troll had been found three corridors over from the Slytherin common room. It was reported that it had developed second degree burns on its hands, dislocated its right shoulder, and *somehow* obtained a minor concussion. The troll was cautiously charmed and transported by a small Auror team to an unknown location.

The fact the troll's injuries were public knowledge quickly forced the dynamics of students to shift uncontrollably. Students became suspicious of one another, tensions were nearing a breaking point across houses. Hufflepuffs were snapping at Ravenclaws, just the other day a Gryffindor upper year landed himself in the hospital wing after tackling another student down a flight of stairs.

Adrian was thankful Lutain hadn't bit the creature, if that was the case there would only be so few suspects.

Draco found the situation amusing, resting in the self-satisfied glow of *finally* having Adrian under Snape's wrath. Adrian had almost received a detention for sliding into the common room at such an inopportune moment. The only reason he hadn't was due to his spotless track record. Once the troll was found with *burns,* regardless of the previous evidence which implied otherwise, the whispers started. His mysterious tardiness alongside the troll's injuries painted a target on his back as the only suspect in the eyes of his house-mates. Of course, in a castle populated by students, some legally of age to be considered an adult, it would be asinine for teachers and aurors to interrogate an eleven year old boy.

It didn't deter Draco, who took it as his personal mission to pry the truth out of Adrian.

"Seems funny, that a troll was actually in the castle." Draco drawled, moving a chess piece one square forward. Blaise scowled at his opponent, thinking rapidly to counter the move.

"It musta been one heck of a spell to bring it here." Theo noted, looking just as twitchy as ever,

“Musta been one heck of a spell to take it down.”

“If it *was* a spell.” Draco trailed off, implications weighing heavy as once more, his silver eyes slid to Adrian and his trademark book.

“You all are missing the point,” Adrian stated with a sigh, turning a page absentmindedly with two fingers, “Someone, not a student or staff, brought a *live mountain troll* into Hogwarts, *past* the wards.”

Blaise rolled his eyes, “Calm down there, Harry.”

Adrian stiffened suddenly, tensing his entire body to the point of miniscule trembles.

“ *What,* did you call me?” He asked, forcing casualness despite the rising swell of anxiety and rage. His legs tensed spasmitaclly, his own brute effort to restrain from leaping across and pummeling his roomate. How Adrian wished to see him choke- how the scenario flashed before his eyes with Adrian’s own primitive snarl and his fingers tightening against the fluttering throat-

Blaise blinked lazily and bored, “Harry. Your name is Hadrianus isn’t it? Adrian was getting old-”

“I like it,” Theo chimed, quickly flinching and shying away once he noticed Adrian’s countenance, “Or, er, not?”

“Zabini, you’re switching rooms with Nott.”

Blaise paused, “Like *hell* I am-”

“Coltello.” Adrian hissed out, snapping his book shut with a crack. His freezing spell was over, now he rolled with the jerky movements of barely restrained violence. Blaise’s eyes widened and his nostrils flared.

“No?” Adrian asked, his voice was wavering suspiciously high, “So get *out.”*

Blaise’s jaw tensed but he relinquished with sharp nod.

Unaware of the perils of approaching, an upper year walked forward from the other side of the Slytherin Common Room.

“Adrian Selwyn?” Either arrogant or unobserving, an upper year addressed the group carelessly. Theo pointed wordlessly at Adrian, his thin face still expressing the finest twitch of alarm. Blaise recovered first, groaning loudly in frustration as once again, Draco had cornered him into a check.

As if the sound had broken an unspoken spell, the atmosphere broke and melted away.

“How may I be of assistance?” Adrian monotonously asked, relaxing his clenched fists and blinking three times to compose himself.

“You do things for people, right?” The boy asked, looking uncomfortable as he just now comprehended how terse the four were. Adrian gave a minor nod, confirming what was almost public knowledge already.

“Would you meet with this, ah, another student and get something for me?” the boy asked, trying to hide his instinctive shifting of weight.

Considering how shady this already sounded, it didn’t take much of a guess to assume who it was Adrian would have to see.

“I’m to pay Calum a visit?” Adrian sighed, “I don’t do things from the generosity of my heart.”

“What heart?” Draco mumbled, moving a rook to overtake Blaise’s poorly placed knight.

The boy flushed, either embarrassed or annoyed. He reached into his bag- charmed to be larger internally then it appeared. After sinking his arm up to his elbow in the brown sack’s innards, he retrieved a package wrapped in brown paper.

“Two vials of Dreamless Sleep potion, I managed to snag them from the hospital wing awhile back. They’re still good.” The boy urged, Adrian plucked the package and absentmindedly fingered the paper edging.

“Don’t the older students brew this?” Adrian raised one eyebrow, looking disappointed with the offer, “How is this any better than what I can get?”

“It’s Pomfrey,” The boy blinked, looking gobsmacked, “She gets them from St. Mungos!”

Adrian suspected she actually purchased them from a potion supplier company, not St. Mungos directly. Having industrial strength potions instead of blind trust in someone’s brewing abilities *was* beneficial.

Adrian set the package beside him on his couch, procuring his wand and offering the end daintily. The boy blinked in confusion but pinched the wooden end between his forefinger and thumb.

“Peddlemus, there. I’ll uphold in our bargain. When and where?” Adrian interrogated quietly, obtaining the relevant information. The boy, Dyrik, left.

“That’s what you do?” Draco asked, much more interested having seen the exchange first hand, “You work in little arrangements?”

“I’ve gotten over fifty galleons, and It’s not even holiday break.” Adrian noted, raising one eyebrow at Draco’s gobsmacked expression, “It’s an excellent business.”

Adrian walked up the steps quickly and with precision. His shoes- swapped for soft soles, permitted him to climb the steps essentially silent.

He took the first right once reaching the top of the staircase, seeing the faint glimmer of the setting sun illuminate the covered bridge. A tall figure was leaning against one of the arches, looking at the view of the Black Lake.

“It’s been a while, Calum.” Adrian smiled politely, walking out past the heating wards. The chill of nearly winter bit through his cloak mercilessly.

Calum spun, glaring at Adrian with scowl, “What you doing here, kid?”

“Dyrik sends his regards.” Adrian explained, holding out two galleons which Calum snatched up tentatively. In turn, Calum pulled out two vials of something dark, before passing it over. Adrian grabbed it in his significantly smaller hands.

“Careful there, that’s all I got.” Calum warned.

“Look at you, a potions dealer.” Adrian chuckled, sliding the twin vials into his pocket. Calum scowled, looking on the verge of saying more.

He didn't, instead he stormed past Adrian through the wards back into the warmth of the castle. Adrian followed soon after, although the view from the bridge was amazing he'd rather be dressed more suitably against the temperature.

He was descending the stairs when he ran into Hermione. The girl flushed wildly, but seemed determined in a self righteous way.

"Adrian." she huffed, putting her hands on her hips dramatically in a way which reminded him of Draco, "I want to make a bet!"

Adrian blinked, overly conscious of the vials in his pocket, "Deals. I make *deals.* Do you have coin?"

She deflated instantly, the Gryffindor bravado vanished from her body like the water of a sink leaving when it's plug was pulled. She chewed her lip- a horrid habit with teeth like hers, hesitantly shaking her head. Adrian felt a surge of disgust, had others truly caved under an expression so pitiful? Bella would have sent him something memorable if he ever tried an expression as unsightly as that.

"I can make other deals, favours. What is it you need?" Adrian asked, tilting his head curiously.

"I- I'm trying to find anything on this name," she chewed on her lip unsure. She didn't seem motivated to indulge him any more information before they had an accordance of sort.

Adrian pulled out his wand and offered the end to Hermione. "Hold the tip, I'll cast the spell. If I don't follow through you won't be expected in any way to help me later on." Hermione nodded and grabbed it carefully.

"Peddlemus."

Her eyes widened when she felt the warm tingle, Adrian slid his wand back in his pocket. "What is it you need help with?"

"Nicholas Flamel." Hermione blurted all too eager for his help, "I- I *know* the name but I can't remember from where!"

Flamel, Adrian remembered that name. The ancient man had worked alongside Lutain's namesake, generally he had created spells for transmutation. Ingredients for alchemy and metallurgy.

"I'll find out. Where is the Gryffindor common room located?" Adrian asked calmly, Hermione dutifully explained that the room was located behind the portrait of the Fat Woman just off the stairwells.

Now all Adrian had to do was to figure out why Flamel was important enough to have Hermione make a deal with him.

Adrian returned to the large train, prepped to transport the students back to King's Cross station. Snow had just started to sprinkle, a gentle sight Adrian had seen rarely since he had lived in lower England instead of northern Scotland.

He diverted his eyes once removing himself from the carriage. The Thestrals snuffed loudly, no steam rising from the sunken nostrils.

Adrian once again secured a single compartment for himself. This time he had dragged his trunk along with him, feather-light and slightly shrunken for better maneuvering.

"Going home?" Lutain questioned, peering around the compartment and flicking his tongue wildly, *"Home-rats taste best."*

" That's because you're spoiled." Adrian murmured under his breath, reaching into his other pocket to retrieve a broken quill he had stuffed in one late night at the library.

He held it loosely, twirling the broken shaft and split vanes between his fingers.

He pulled gently at the thrumming whispers under his skin, fingers tingling until they nearly burned just under the nail beds; the quill shivered, changing and warping in a grotesque slow transformation. Sharp edges vibrated on the border of comprehension before warping into brown. The mass of the quill expanded then shrunk, bubbling on the surface like Crabbe's failed potions. It spasmed in an awkward jumble of magic, something wild and unrestrained forced and shackled to obey Adrian's focus and desire. It settled and cooled rapidly, complete and laying limp in the shape of a dead mouse.

Lutain scented it immediately, his head turned and wavered as his tongue poked through the small hole in his frontal jaw and flickered incessantly.

Adrian smiled wordlessly, his mind sated if not slightly exhausted from the adrenal *thrill* which occurred after the release of his magic. It had been a painfully long while since he had any reason to release his intent and shape something to his pleasure.

"Mine?" Lutain asked eagerly, dancing instinctevly at the rodent, *"Mine still if you say not. This mine."*

The door to the compartment slid open at the single time to witness not only Lutain's jaws unhinging to consume a limp rodent, but also the baffling carefree grin on Adrian's face.

"Bloody hell," Draco breathed "That is more terrifying than triple detention with Filch."

Adrian's smile instantly fell and his expression returned to normal range of clouded impasse. He turned his head, giving Draco one of his dryest glances; Adrian's hair was ruffled still which partially damaged his newfound composure.

"Why are you here?" Draco ignored the inquiry and instead sat on the seat across from Adrian, he watched Lutain for a moment with tense body language.

"My father always hosts a Yule Ball." Draco started, his head lifted high.

"I won't be able to attend," Adrian cut off Draco, hastily adding in, "No insult intended for your noble house. It would have been a pleasure, although regrettably in my own family the traditions of yule are more..." Adrian trailed off, before offering a wry smile, "It's difficult to explain."

Draco's eyes were clouded although he gave a sharp nod of understanding. He rose, prim and proper before walking to the doors of the compartment and pausing, "I fully anticipate gifts for the holidays from you, Adrian. Obviously it will be reciprocated."

Adrian gave the barest movement of a nod, "Obviously,"

Adrian returned to the Lestrange household with loud squeals from Bella and gruff welcomes from her husband and brother-in-law.

Bellatrix was rough, grasping his arm excitedly and with enough vigor to blossom bruises under his skin. He returned it briefly, taking a step back as Bellatrix's eyes scanned his face to take in his new appearance.

"Your hair is getting too long," She tutted her tongue, grasping the long strands roughly, they were being swept aside on his forehead to not obscure his eyesight. "Have you gotten thinner?"

"Unlikely considering the ridiculous amount of pudding and pastries at every meal," Adrian rebutted, causing Bellatrix to wriggle in joy.

She was eager, already casting spells upwards against the creaking and groaning supports above their head. Adrian kept his wand on him, ready for a shielding spell incase Bella's spell's resulted in breaking the roof after all.

Hedwig returned and took to roosting in the owlery happily, she had swept into the large dining hall and delivered a still breathing mouse to Lutain to express her satisfaction. The snake in question had ate earlier, Hedwig did not mind his refusal, digging in instead with relish.

The Yule holiday wasn't especially eventful although compared to the daily schedule of Hogwarts, it was filled with a relentless series of drills and fights. Bellatrix was personally adamant that Adrian had forgotten all he had managed to learn, and took her time to draw out their matches until Adrian was nearly whimpering on the ground.

The third day of winter break Adrian managed to perform the stunning spell, although rudimentary and weak in power, it had caught Bella off guard enough that her elbow was clipped and she teetered to the ground.

The fourth day, she was determined to drill in the spell until it was effortless for him, no matter the amount of times she would have to awaken him.

Adrian slumped to the ground, hand clutching his shoulder where crimson weeped from a cutting curse.

Bellatrix folded her legs and sat directly across from him with a savage look in her eye. She poked his arm, ignoring his hiss of pain and licked the red from her dark nails.

"Your father wants you to learn Occlumency." She informed Adrian, causing the latter to freeze; the pain in his arm felt so insignificant all the sudden.

"What?" He breathed, pulling his knees to his chest and clutching them carefully.

"I don't know how to do it," Bellatrix confessed, "He said my brain is a bit too-" her eyes became alit with a maddening fire, "too *confusing* ."

"When does he want me to learn it by?" Adrian swallowed, feeling anxiety rise in his throat and buzz nauseatingly in his stomach, "How much time do I have?"

"Summer?" She asked, tilting her head as she squinted into nothing, "Summer I think?"

"That's not long," Adrian whispered, hand spasming into a tight fist. Bellatrix acted like the information wasn't new, she could have given him more time. She could have *told* him.

He almost saw a filter slide over his eyes, something dark and shrouding his vision. He looked at Bella, so intimately cold at her, and with a crack of one knuckle she was suddenly trapped in the chaotic mingling of screams and laughter.

“Why didn’t you tell me *sooner.”* Adrian bit out, somewhere between hysteria and raw fury. “You could have given me more *time.”*

He released her, the pressure vanishing as the hands pushing on his skull released their grip. She went lack on the ground, still laughing although they only sounded winded.

“Because,” her voice bubbled between still twitching lips, “It’s funny when you do *this.”*

“You think it’s funny?” Adrian asked, voice strikingly cold; he twisted his head, trying to get something in his neck to crack on the one side while it refused to do so.

He pressed on her, feeling something in his chest tighten as her breath refused to come to him. She spasmed on the ground, unable to laugh with the air being pulled from her very lungs.

“You’ve placed me in a poor situation, Lestrange.” Adrian’s voice was ice, “ *Not* again.”

He released her, and walked away.

Christmas Day Adrian spent with Lutain nestled on a stack of warm towels, and Hedwig perched in the branches of an obnoxiously large tree in the drawing room.

Rodolphus and Rabastan were gone often the days leading up to the holiday, apparently on missions to recruit or blackmail wizards. Christmas day they were battered with broken bones and blackened eyes, all in various states of healing.

“Let’s ignore that,” Bellatrix huffed, instead sliding a hazardous wrapped box over towards Adrian. “Open it!”

Adrian did so, pulling on the tape to loosen the paper. It was a crate, and inside that was a single key.

He held it up questioningly, to which Bellatrix elaborated that it was a key to her childhood home. She didn’t understand Adrian’s compulsion or longing with every book within sight, but could recognize the vast collection of books and scrolls that belonged to the family of Black held valuable wealth.

Rodolphus gifted him a journal, one thick and black Adrian immediately designated to keep track of all the deals that had transacted. Rodulphus also gave him various objects that although showed an effort, it didn’t show that he knew Adrian very well. Socks, a pair of new boots, treats for Hedwig and a potion for Lutain to aid during sheds. Rabastan went slightly further, giving him an inkwell fashioned from some sort of magical creature’s claw, and a collection of potions in small vials; most were likely questionable in content.

There was another gift, in a small box with silvery embossed paper. Once Adrian was able to see it closer, the embossing was actually a delicate peacock feather pattern.

“The Malfoy’s?” Adrian asked, glancing at Bella who shrugged and looked at the paper.

Adrian pulled it open, lifting the black lid off until he spotted the shimmering black fabric.

He pulled it out carefully, the material feeling almost like silk yet it likely was much stronger.

“Why would Malfoy’s gift me something?”

He lifted the entire mass from the box, freezing when he deciphered spidery handwriting at the very bottom.

‘You will show your worth.’

It wasn’t signed, and it didn’t need to be.

He pulled the cloth out and unfolded it, it was a cloak. The trimmings were in silver with ivory clasps akin to Death Eater masks. The tail of the cloak was in tatters, select strands touching the floor while other ratty tears only met his calf. The material was silky and chillingly cold compared to the rest of the cloak.

“Adrian,” Bellatrix spoke, voice low as she leant in to be heard, “The Dark Lord has named you as his heir,” Her lips nearly touched his ear, “ *Cerastes.”*

Like a viper rearing to strike, Adrian felt the thick coils of something under his skin tightening in tension.

He was out of time after all.

Admittance

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian fulfills his side of the bargain, still can't master Occlumency and unknowingly aided in losing the House Cup.

Chapter Notes

Alright everyone, this is the last chapter of year one. The next chapter will begin with second year, where things instantly start picking up speed.
Someone asked about update schedules and admittedly, my schedule revolves entirely around my beta. Rest assured, I'll be trying to crank out these chapters as fast as possible.
If you would like more accurate information or would like access to fanart, feel free to follow my tumblr url 'Digitalta'.
Once again, a huge cry of thanks to my beta who has suffered through my blatent American-isms and awkward sentence structure to make something beautiful.

Draco kept his word as well as the gift Adrian sent him. Adrian was rather amused with the large collections of Honeydukes chocolate courtesy of Pansy. Blaise sent a large spiraling branch from a corkwood tree (Lutain said that the aroma was positively divine). Draco gifted him an impressively thick book on advanced spellwork which was interesting, but paled to the one of a kind collection of dark spells from the Nott library itself. Hopefully each of his classmates appreciated the gilded quills he sent.

Bellatrix kept true to her word and apparated the two into the Black Family household. Something about the house felt bizarrely comforting, something deep in the inch thick dust and grime or in the cracked leather covers of ancient tomes. They left after many hours, Bellatrix apparating back and forth twice to accommodate trunks filled with handpicked books from the ceiling-tall shelves.

Returning to Hogwarts was enjoyable, although it meant he could only indulge the reading of two of his new books. Thankfully, both subjects were on Occlumency, which now was at the forefront of his mind.

The concept of Occlumency was to create mental barriers in one's mind to prevent a user of Legilimency from finding purchase and tampering with your very thoughts or memories. It seemed like it would be a difficult skill; Adrian doubted he’d be able to learn it in such a short time.

The Slytherin common rooms were just how they left it, his room rather much the same. The only exception was Theo who plastered up posters of a quidditch team Adrian didn’t recognize.

Adrian felt that in his absence over the break, his use as an information broker had become, if not public knowledge, then widely known in the snake den. His leather journal was slowly being filled with ink, listing the names and the specifics of what deals he had made and what advantages to reap.

The rest of the year was looking to be very interesting.

“I’m sorry but if you don’t know the password--” The Fat Lady started, her tone objectionable.

“I’m aware,” Adrian interrupted, crossing his arms behind his back. “However if you could just pass a message along for me...?”

The Fat Lady floundered, looking unsure at the other whispering portraits.

Thankfully, she didn’t have to decide as the painting swung outwards. An upper year stumbled backwards into the hole, not expecting Adrian to be standing there.

“What-- who are *you?*” The boy stammered, before squinting at Adrian suspiciously. “Wait, are you a *snake?*”

“Could you please get Hermione Granger for me?” Adrian said calmly. “Or perhaps you could let me inside?”

The upper year stared at Adrian like he had sprouted deer antlers. “Er, yeah. Friends with Potter right? Thought that name sounded familiar--” He murmured under his breath, before he turned and vanished back into the Gryffindor stronghold.

Adrian counted slowly. Exhaling and reigning in his temper as slowly the painting swung outwards again. “Alright, snake. Come on in. But we’re watching you!”

Adrian gave a nod of understanding as he stepped through the high lip and stumbled into the tower. It was decorated brightly with warm colours, mostly reds and golds. A bright cheery fire and well abused velvet furniture made the tower seem similar to the inside of an antiques store in Diagon Alley.

“Adrian!” Hermione bubbled, jumping up from a couch where she had been reading on her own. “Oliver said you were here but I didn’t believe it!”

Adrian gave a polite smile and awkwardly accepted her hug, then he reached into his side bag and pulled up a slender scroll of parchment. “Miss Granger, I believe I have information for you.”

Hermione’s eyes lit up and she eagerly guided him to a couch. He handed her the scroll, watching with feigned disinterest as she read over the near biography of Nicholas Flamel.

Her jaw dropped and she ran her hands through her bushy hair. “Adrian this is-- this is amazing!” Her eyes started shining with the newfound knowledge, then she chewed anxiously on her bottom lip. “Do you-- could you find out another thing for me?”

“Likely, although it may take time.”

“Do you know how to get past a Cerberus?”

Adrian paused. “A... *cerberus?* Are you sure it’s not a Kerberos or a Garmr?”

Hermione blinked, utterly baffled before she chewed on her lip again. “It’s... big. *Really* big. It has dark fur and looks like a bull terrier? But as big as a tree!”

“No snake on its tail?” Adrian asked dryly. Hermione only looked confused. “Alright, that is a

Cerberus. Cerberuses have a weakness to any sort of music. It'll cause them to fall asleep instantly."

Hermione jumped to her feet and wrapped Adrian in a hug once more.

"Oi! Get off her!" Adrian craned his neck, only seeing red hair before he felt someone punch his cheek.

His head snapped to the side, Hermione jumped off and began to scold whoever it was who had assaulted him. Internally Adrian began a soothing mantra, trying to reign in his aggravated emotions. A small slap was nothing; a minor healing charm could fix it once he left. He had been hurt worse than *this,* yet the person attached to the hand wasn't exactly helping in the circumstances.

"Ronald! This is Adrian!" Hermione scolded.

"You never said he was a slimy git too!"

"He's *helping* us!" Hermione scowled. "And you can't just attack him like-- like--"

"Like what!"

"Like an *idiot!"*

"Enough!" A new voice cried out, one which led all of Adrian to hiss and coil to lash and *kill* --

He twisted instantly; his back hunched as he curled inwards and drew his wand. His entire visage shifted from the forcibly relaxed to something wounded and vicious.

"Talk sense in her, Skylar mate." Ron said frowning. "She's gone and lost it."

"I have *not!* "

"Skylar Potter." Adrian stood, removing his hand from his face and instead held it aloft. He forced his shoulders back in a way which seemed painful, and plastered a thin lipped smile onto his face. "I've heard plenty of interesting things and I do enjoy..." Adrian stood from the couch and took a few steps, shaking Skylar's baffled outstretched hand. " *Interesting* things."

Hermione huffed. "Adrian finds out information. He helped Pavarti before the holidays with that one spell for eye-bags!"

Adrian gave a small nod, confirming the information. His eyes never left the gentle hazel mixture of somewhere in between blue and Lily's green.

"He found *this."* Hermione whispered, handing over the scroll which Skylar forcibly broke Adrian's gaze to roll open. Skylar stared a few moments, reading Adrian's uniquely spider-like handwriting.

Ron snatched it and squinted at the uniform small print. "Did a rat write this?"

Hermione smacked his arm.

Skylar puffed up one cheek, looking lopsided as he looked over the writing more suspiciously. "You write this, mate?"

Adrian's hands twitched with the barely restrained urge to *throttle* Skylar.

“Can I get you to do my potions essay?” Ron joked, although that changed to gobsmacked when Adrian gave a curt nod.

“Ronald, Adrian deals out bets, wagers,” Hermione struggled to explain. “Deals and that sort.”

“Deals?” Skylar’s expression was more critical, and with one hand he rubbed it over the edge of his jaw under his left ear. “That sounds a bit shady there, mate. Careful who you go bargaining to.”

Adrian felt the entirely understandable urge to smack the boy just as Weasley had done before. Of *course* Adrian knew full well that he was dealing complicated business, there Skylar Potter to criticize *his work.* Skylar had *everything* handed to him--

“I mean, I just don’t want you getting into tough business.” Skylar interrupted roguishly, “If you do, give us a shout. A friend of Hermione’s is a friend of mine.”

--Adrian had to *work for everything* .

“I wouldn’t mind if he gets a bit roughed up,” Weasley muttered, still loud enough for Adrian.

Weasley didn’t know *pain* the way Adrian had.

“If that’s all you need, Miss Granger?” Adrian clipped stiffly, taking a few steps back to slowly glare at Hermione who blushed and shook her head. “Then I’ll take my leave. Best of luck to your ventures.”

He turned and walked as quickly as he could out of the tower, the air had begun to fill and become stiflingly hot.

He wondered for the smallest moment what it would feel like to kill the famous Skylar Potter.

The rest of the year drifted by almost like a Spring mist. Everyone was caught in the mindless repetition of classes and homework, studying material over and over in the shadows of looming exams, such that one day seemed to blend into the next into the next.

The upper years were quiet, strangely so, as they vanished to wherever they went to study.

And then the exams were upon them and even Adrian found himself concentrating on his studies. His occlumency was still hopeless, but he hardly had time to worry about that now. When he wasn’t studying, he and Lutain were both pressed with lethargy.

Adrian had almost forgotten entirely about Hermione and her questions until the leaving feast was upon them, when the house cup was unfairly stolen from Slytherin and awarded to Gryffindor.

Once he’d snapped out of the lethargy that accompanied exams, Adrian had worked out that the “Golden Trio”, as the rest of the school had started to refer to the three, Skylar, his pet Weasley, and Hermione Granger, had passed the Cerberus with his aid and ventured into the spelled depths of the forbidden corridor on the third floor to retrieve the Philosopher’s Stone.

Although the prize would be marvelous, the risk surrounding it was too great. Evidently it had lured *something* to the castle, something which had let in the troll, attacked Snape (a couple of the upper years mumbled seeing him walking with a limp) and ventured after the fabled artefact. The trio most likely were aware of the threat and acted accordingly to stop it.

Adrian mused what misguided fool would try to sneak into the castle even with Dumbledore leaving for one day.

The Great Hall was filled with the echoing chaos of whistles and clapping. All three tables rejoiced as the green banners shifted to red with flourish. Fireworks crackled in the enchanted sky overhead, illuminating the grimaces and scowls of Adrian's housemates. He kept his own face perfectly neutral.

Adrian met with Hermione's breathless excited eyes over the distance. Her smile grew wider and something in her eyes were warmer as well. Ronald Weasley stated something, inaudible at that distance, which distracted the witch from Adrian's gaze.

It didn't matter. As far as Adrian was concerned, he had established something that would linger much longer than any fool-hearted attempts to steal a relic.

"*Time to go home*," Lutain cheered, content enough to lounge alongside the gilded plates from the feast.

Adrian felt the same.

End of Year One

Blots

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian gets cursed, Bella proves to be immature, and Lucius Malfoy tackles a man into a bookshelf

Chapter Notes

Here's the first chapter of the second year, this proves to be the transition period of the summer before school starts again.
Thanks to my wonderful beta, and how quickly these chapters were taken care of.

Adrian’s Occlumency shields were pitiful at best. Due to the well shrouded secret of his very existence, he was not permitted to visit with a teacher who could fortify his own walls.

Which left his father as the only Legilimens between the Lestranges and the scarce number who were aware of his existence.

Adrian was rather uncomfortable with calling the shriveled, snakelike creature, who looked more like a mandrake root than an actual person, his father, but there was something about drawing closer to the Dark Lord... something which made his skull *ache* yet sent addictively soothing waves of sensation through his blood and left him dazed and slowly walking ever closer.

The Dark Lord’s residence felt purged of magic. Unlike the ancient noble house of Black, where dark magic oozed and bubbled from the peeling wallpaper, Adrian could scarcely feel its mark on the crown molding or the plastered ceiling.

He knew where his father was, something in his heartbeat drawing louder and yet somehow indiscernible whispers tickling the corners of his hearing. He opened the large door at the end of the stairwell, slipping inside blindly. Adrian paused, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the lack of lighting. The fireplace was in use, the flickering flames casting dancing shadows and filling the room with the smell of burning pine.

The door slid shut behind him, trapping him inside.

“My Occlumency shields are not yet in place,” Adrian murmured, trying to resist the wavering uncertainty. “I assure you, my Lord, I press to better them.”

He spotted the claw like hand curl inwards from the armrest, holding daintily a bleached wand as long as Adrian’s forearm.

There was a pause in the air.

“You see that you do,” The high pitched voice triggered a ringing buzz in Adrian’s head. “*What* did you address me?”

Adrian stumbled. “I- I apologize, father, It will not-“

“*Crucio.*”

His head screeched and his very nerves were alight with fire. It was a baffling sensation, through the agony of *pain!pain!pain!* the very sense of touch had been distorted and perverted until all that existed was the raging inferno. The smoldering burn which echoed the laughter of Suzie and the thrashing of David’s death throes.

For some illogical reason through the suffocating hell, he envisioned a single sparrow fluttering to the ground with venom in its blood.

He felt the curse release instantaneously. Blood was burning in his veins but he could feel it warm down his arms and legs, filling his fingers and toes which were contorted and cramping.

He was laying on the ground, the cloak covering his still twitching body. His throat was hoarse and raw, blood sliding down from where his tongue had been bitten through. Snot and tears made his face sticky and damp.

He gasped, the sound was humiliating yet he couldn’t prevent it. He breathed heavily, on the verge of sobbing as each joint and socket moaned out in its of suffering. It took him too long to rise to his knees, longer still to manage a crawling position.

“Come here.”

Adrian didn’t dare resist. He dragged himself over the floor slowly, collapsing at one point, his limbs leaden and his fingers trembling violently. He kept moving, forcing himself to crawl, until he reached the large chair and the skeletal homunculus sitting with its talon-edged feet just above Adrian.

Adrian whimpered, his eyesight blurring at the sides, his eyelids drooping before his sluggish thoughts could force them open again. A clawed hand touched Adrian’s head and he whimpered again, shaking and forcing himself not to flinch away.

It continued, Adrian couldn’t stop the tears from cascading or the pathetic sounds from escaping his throat.

“I expect you to do better,” the homunculus said, continuing with its mockery of human affection. “You know what happens if I am…displeased.”

“Yes father,” Adrian whimpered, eyes sliding shut once again.

It continued for a while. His father spoke a few times, stating spells that Adrian evidently would have to master the next time he came in, or at least have Bella teach him.

There was a strange part of Adrian that always seemed to intuitively know what his father was feeling. It was alarming to suspect his father was content with running his claws through Adrian’s hair. Even more so to suspect his father would *miss* his company.

It was after all, just a speculation.

Rabastan pulled out vials and began checking the labels on the side, he returned it and continued

on when not finding the desired potion.

Adrian was back at the Lestrage household, sitting pathetically on a corner of a long cracked leather couch in the main sitting room. Rodulphus was arguing with his wife, who was too perplexed to quite understand the situation.

“I never had any potions!” Bellatrix argued, “The boy doesn’t need any!”

“Because you certainly ended up sane from cruciatus curses.” Rodulphus argued, splaying out one hand towards Adrian, “He’s eleven!”

“So!”

“He’ll result in nerve damage or almost as crazy as you!”

Bellatrix huffed, casting an eye at the curled form of Adrian, who wasn’t entirely lucid.

Lutain was curled protectively nearby, watching his master with unease.

Adrian himself looked wretched, his skin was pale and nearly see through in areas where it was naturally thinner. His eyes were glazed, large patches of red from where capillaries had burst on his cornea. His lips were stained red where blood still oozed down his chin, and throughout all of that his legs and arms still flailed uncontrollably from the muscle contractions and further spasms.

Rabastan finally found the proper potion and pulled it out; Adrian’s eyes flickered to it. The younger reached upwards, trying to grasp the vial yet the violent trembling of his fingers left any coordination impossible.

“None of that,” Rabastan grunted, grabbing Adrian’s jaw and pushing the vial between bloody lips, “The bugger bit his tongue too.”

“I can heal it!” Bellatrix chirped, only for Rodulphus to argue, “You’ll fuse his tongue to his mouth!”

Adrian let out a low keening noise, which Lutain tensed to hear.

“I still don’t get why it’s such a big deal,” Bellatrix huffed, “He’s gotten the curse before-“

Adrian violently turned, arching backwards and twisting. He managed eventually, his pained actions ordering silence from the three caregivers in the room. Once his back was facing outwards, and his eyes closed against the back of the couch, the three left the room.

“I will protect you, master.” Lutain swore, poking and prodding Adrian’s back with his blunt snout.

He felt comfort in the title, somehow finding satisfaction and stability in the fact that if he was unable to decide his own fate, he at least held power over *something.*

The spell, it was damnation. It was *power.*

Something from the events from earlier didn’t seem to exactly line up. From his understanding, his father held servants under the curse for much longer than Adrian. Multiple castings were common, Bellatrix had confessed the first time Adrian had experienced the spell, that she once had upwards of six individual castings in a single meeting.

Adrian had blatantly failed his orders for accomplishing Occlumancy, yet he had only one

significantly short curse.

Perhaps his father was trying to teach him something after all.

He had received letters from Theo alongside Draco, although he suspected the latter was just formalities. Theo's letter had been lengthy, highly speculative about the new Defense Against the Dark Art's teacher.

Adrian had immediately looked into the matter, reading only two of the assigned books (which were in fact Gilderoy Lockhart's complete collection) before summarizing that it was all gargoyle rubbish.

There were clear contradictions in the stories, along with simple facts that were impossible due to the time frame of events in the other books. He had pointed out the flaws to Bellatrix, who sniffed once and reduced his book to purple smoke. It even smelt pompous and extravagant.

The destruction of one of his required books meant that he was now forced to purchase *another* copy, which Bellatrix relented and agreed to pay for herself.

Another matter had come up, something which led to a certain amount of dread as Adrian followed closely behind Bella through the streets of Knockturn.

With Adrian's naming, Bellatrix had explained that it was now implied that he must be marked. Not a Dark Mark, which would be too obvious, but something relatively similar.

Nagini was a gorgeous snake, her patterns and her scales were dazzling and according to Lutain, her shed was *always* smooth. It didn't surprise Adrian when Bellatrix informed him that Nagini herself would be plastered under the surface of his skin.

Bellatrix admitted that she was not familiar with any sort of permanent marking or inking spells, which led them to pushing through the streets of Knockturn to the well-known parlor *Markus Scarrs Indelible Tattoos*. Adrian wasn't excited, and with a false cool exterior he entered the store after Bellatrix.

It was ramshack like almost all of Knockturn, the floorboards had thin gaps between them, everything else was aged slightly grey. The man behind the counter looked at them, he had a series of porcupine quills protruding from his scalp instead of hair.

"Well well," The man spoke, his voice deceptively hoarse, "If it isn't Mrs. Lestrange herself."

Bellatrix flashed a somewhat crazy grin and pushed Adrian forward, "You're going to mark this boy, and with the spelled ink."

The porcupine blinked, "Ain'e a bit young?"

Bellatrix beamed, "Nope!"

The man shrugged and walked out from around his counter, looking at Adrian with a critical eye, "Wha' kind of spell again?"

"The portrait spell, and enchantments for movements and physical interaction." Bellatrix rattled off, causing the man to lift one eyebrow- thankfully with actual hair.

“Painting you a pretty lady, eh?” The porcupine winked, eying up Adrian with a lewd grin.

“A snake,” Adrian deadpanned, eyes glinting sharply, “Like her arm.”

The man paused, looking seriously at Bellatrix who now was twirling her wand, “Get out.”

“Oh don’t be daft,” Bellatrix huffed, walking over to sit harshly on a three legged stool near an archaic looking tattoo chair, “He’s not *actually* getting it. He just wants a snake like it. I can provide memory reference,” She tailed off, watching as the porcupine man gulped and eyed Bellatrix’s wand carefully.

“Come here, boy,” The man grunted, yanking Adrian over to the archaic chair, “Ruddy well get it over with.”

Bellatrix hummed, pressing her wand to her skull and pulling out a thin strand of *something* from her temple. Adrian watched in fascination as the man pulled out a single needle apparatus with an open vial at the top. The silvery liquid slid into the needle, and the porcupine tapped the side.

“Right,” He coughed, “How big?”

Bellatrix grinned and held her fingers two inches apart, “This is it’s head.”

The man’s eyes bulged, gasping and staring at Adrian who already was silently removing his shirt.

“Are you bonkers! The boy is a birch tree!” Porcupine argued, “It’d be as long as his leg!”

“That’s why you’re going to give it a physical interaction and movement!” Bellatrix snapped, pointing the wand at the man.

The man gulped, and slowly casted something under his breath on the hollow needle. He casted a few more spells, continuing until the very tip of the metal changed to the silver colour itself.

Without any other words, he leant forward and pressed it into Adrian’s skin.

It hurt, only like an annoying tingle under his skin. It spread from the needle point, glowing silver across his chest and over one shoulder, looping low and across his ribs before its tail continued down his thigh out of sight.

It slowly faded, and from the fading scales began to rise, pressing outwards and filling like Nagini herself was rising from his bones. It blinked awake, flickering its tongue and peering outwards attentively towards Bellatrix.

“There,” The Porcupine swallowed, shifting and pulling out a shrunken canvas. He enlarged it, before pressing the needle against the fabric and tinting the material black. “And here’s your portrait.”

Bellatrix accepted the canvas, and looked at Adrian expectantly.

Adrian looked down at his chest where Nagini was slithering up and investigating his collarbone, *“Nagini, go to the picture.”*

The porcupine man gasped and spluttered in growing horror. The snake turned, looking as if it was somehow going underwater. Its picture warped and gradually vanished, until its tail slid inside the ripple and it was entirely gone from Adrian’s skin.

It slithered into view in the portrait, peering around once more, and giving a loud hiss towards

Porcupine.

Bellatrix smiled, and Adrian quietly slid his shirt back on.

“Thank you!” Bellatrix chimed, jumping upright without offering any sort of payment to the man, Adrian didn’t think that he would expect it anyways.

Once outside, Bellatrix passed him a few galleons, more than enough to replace the one book, and apparated him to the entrance of Diagon Alley.

“I’ll be back in an hour,” Bellatrix waved, before she vanished from sight with a jarring crack.

Adrian stepped into the crowded streets, finding the situation very similar to last year. He wished that he had brought Lutain, but his familiar had eaten a rather large breakfast and was unable to move quickly for the rest of the day.

He moved towards the bookstore, almost immediately feeling that something was wrong with the building.

It was unsettling, he leant to the side, one hand holding him balanced as he stared off and tried to pinpoint what it was that was making him so uneasy.

“Adrian!”

Adrian snapped his head around, looking at the rather baffled but uncomfortably smiling face of Hermione.

Adrian started over towards her, not quite comprehending still the situation.

“Pleasure seeing you once more,” Adrian nodded, looking over her shoulder to see why she was so anxious-

-right as a younger girl’s cauldron flew across the floor and an elder red haired man tackled *Lucius Malfoy* into a bookshelf.

Dozens of heavy spell books came falling down on their heads; there was a collective yell of, “Get him, Dad!” from two twins Adrian’s elders; assumedly his wife shrieking, “No, Arthur, no!”; the crowd stampeded backwards and knocked more shelves to the ground.

“Break it up, here, gents, break it up-“

Now it was a large man, Hogwart’s Groundkeeper if Adrian recalled correctly, waded inwards through the sea of collapsed books and in an instant, managed to pull Lucius Malfoy and who he assumed as Mr. Weasley, apart.

Mr. Weasley had a cut lip and Lucius was starting to develop a dark spot on his forehead.

He was still holding a Transfiguration book; he thrust it out at the younger red haired girl and spat “Here, girl- take your book- it’s the best your father can give you-“

He turned and with as much dignity as he could spare he beckoned for Draco, who was rather humiliated as default, and they left the shop.

“Yeh should’ve ignored him, Arthur,” The gamekeeper grumbled, shaking his head morosely, “Rotten ter the core, the whole family, every-one knows that- no Malfoy’s worth listenin’ ter- bad blood, that’s what it is- slimy Slytherins ter all-“

Adrian cleared his throat, drawing attention from the gamekeeper who looked curious.

Hermione gasped in alarm and flushed quickly, “I’m sure Hagrid didn’t mean that, Adrian! Not *all* Slytherins are bad! I mean, you-“ She cut off quickly, thoroughly embarrassed.

“You’re that Slytherin-“

“-the broker-“

“-can you give us a deal?” The two twins spun, looking at Adrian interestedly, while their mother scolded them loudly.

“Possibly,” Adrian started slowly, “Although terms will have to be set later.”

The two twins beamed and grinned wickedly. Adrian gave a polite smile and looked back at Hermione who was comforting two adults who looked rather spooked.

“Adrian! These are my parents!” She hurried to introduce, “They’re new to this magic thing!”

“Muggles?” Adrian tested, trying not to wince or think on all experiences he’d suffered due to muggles, “A pleasure to meet you.”

They smiled and thanked him, exchanging utter nonsense with him before the group realized they were to meet someone else outside of Gringotts.

They hurried out, filing around and the manager of the store looked like he wanted to stop them. It was thoroughly amusing.

“Do I know yeh?” Hagrid suddenly rumbled, squinting down at Adrian with a confused expression.

“I don’t think so,” Adrian blinked, “Was the Cerberus from last year yours? I heard he had a beautiful pelt.”

The man’s face lit up instantly and he seemed embarrassed, “Yeh, Fluffy jus’ ‘ad a couple Hornworms e’ery week!”

Adrian nodded, “Wonderful to hear that your Cerberus was well taken care of. I have a familiar, he’s fairly picky with his food, do you perhaps have a good supply of mice or rats? The ones from Diagon over Owl Delivery are sometimes,” Adrian grimaced, “Picked over.”

Hagrid nodded solemnly, “Aye, ruddy job they do, ‘ead down to my ‘ut and we’ll talk!” He beamed and waded out of the store through the books.

Arian paused- the strange sensation had vanished.

And he *still* needed the replacement book Bella destroyed

Voice

Chapter Summary

> Where Adrian gets a strange feeling from a book, Draco takes the house rivalry a bit too far, and snakes tend to ignore Adrian.

Chapter Notes

> I'm attempting to make second year move as quickly as possible, since third year is when things that are outside the canon timeline begin to take place. Due to this, you won't have to suffer and reread a near identical version of the real book. Stay with me, and here comes Adalonda.

Summer vanished all too quickly. The last month of the summer hols was quickly disappearing with daily duels with Bella, studies to increase his spell vocabulary, as well as hours each day to improve his occlumency.

His occlumency was progressing at a steady rate. The concept of Occlumency on its own was difficult, however when he focused on it alongside using the liquid magic in his blood, it created a thin layer, an almost electric barrier around his thoughts. Building that first wall was the most difficult, but now he had to construct enough to prevent a full mental assault.

The added benefit of managing to clear his mind was that it was the first step of achieving his Animagus form. He hadn't the time to actually brew the potion, although given Rabastan's strange sources he could likely obtain the potion for a hefty sum.

The Nagini tattoo wriggled under his flesh, it was a surreal sensation since he could feel each of the muscles tensing and flexing under the muscle of his back. He sometimes watched in a mirror as the skin seemed to split open and the snake slid out of the 'hole'. It would do laps around the length of his body, down one leg before backtracking up and around his neck and shoulders, then it would sink below the skin again; he could feel it moving inside his wrist.

At last it was time to return to Hogwarts. Hedwig screeched and glared with her falcon eyes as Adrian crammed her into a small cage and strapped the cage to a trolley, available just outside the floo point.

The Hogwarts Express loomed large. Billowing clouds of white steam covered the platform. There was a tension in the air, a mixture of anxious shouts and excited squeals of students both eager and not to return to school.

Since Adrian couldn't take a compartment for himself, he instead took a seat next to a now fourth year Slytherin. He had helped this boy the year before with charming an owl into sunshine yellow.

They didn't speak to each other, except once the other Slytherin left due to the urging of a Ravenclaw girl. The compartment slid shut and Adrian relaxed.

"*You can come out now, Lutain.*" Adrian smiled, watching as his familiar slid out of a notch in the side of his trunk. Lutain had grown over the summer, filling out into what was likely his full length. Lutain was *long*, but thin, having a sinuous and lithe body.

"*Was there someone here?*" Lutain asked, scenting the air near where the other boy had sat.

"*Only a student and he's gone*," Adrian assured, smiling at his familiar who yawned wide.

"*I had a warm nap. Very nice, very warm*," Lutain emphasized, looking directly at Adrian, "*You could always make me warm*."

"*But then you wouldn't hang around my neck like a living scarf*," Adrian teased. Lutain gave a low guttural hiss, something similar to a snort.

" *Master I am scales not creature-skins* ."

" *Actually I'm wearing cotton, which Is a plant* ."

Lutain flicked his tongue closer, tasting the edge of his robe which neared the snake's body. *"I do not like vegetables* ."

Adrian failed to stifle a rather unappealing snort, although Lutain seemed very pleased with himself.

The compartment door clicked loudly in warning before sliding open. Adrian looked up at the same red haired girl who he had seen in the bookstore.

"Oh, sorry." She blinked and looking close to tears. "I was-- sorry--"

"It's no problem," Adrian soothed, gesturing for her to come inside. "You're upset. Tell me what's wrong."

She sniffed and balled her hands into little fists, her eyes were filled with determination as she pushed her hair behind one ear. "I-- I can't find my brother and, and we were running late--"

"Your brother, he's a Weasley?"

The girl nodded. "Yeah, my name is Ginny." She hesitated a beat, almost unnoticeably. "You were at the Flourish and Blotts?"

Adrian nodded. "Hermione and I have made a few deals, nothing to concern yourself over. Which brother is this?"

"Ron," she explained, "And, and Skylar Potter."

Adrian tried very carefully to not have his face twitch.

Ginny also took the moment to scream as she noticed Lutain, weaving between Adrian's feet. She yanked herself backwards on the seat, pulling her knees to her chest in alarm.

"That's Lutain," Adrian introduced. "He's my familiar, he won't hurt you. He's *very* docile."

Lutain, now proficient with verbal English obliged and coiled non threateningly around Adrian's leg.

"Now, Skylar Potter is very important, so nothing bad will happen to him and your brother."

Adrian assured. “You can stay here with me if you like?”

Ginny shook her head. “Thank you, but I have a seat with Hermione--“

Adrian nodded and absentmindedly reached out with the magic in his blood, bored for now. He tensed when he felt the *same* abnormality as he felt in the book shop, which meant that--

“Do you have something in your pocket?”

His voice must have changed, because Ginny instantly looked suspicious and alarmed. Her hand flew to her front right pocket, her hand folding over against the rough shape of--

Well, it was hardly unexpected that she had a book with her. She was just a scared firstie. She probably had a copy of *Hogwarts: A History* in her robe. That was hardly unique to her. Adrien remembered overhearing Hermione mentioning random facts from the book prior to their own Sorting last year.

“Never mind,” Adrian said. He offered her a smile. “I was thinking of something else. Best of luck to yourself and your brother.”

Ginny nodded and scampered away rather quickly.

The strange cooing sensation lingered a bit longer before it too faded.

Adrian didn’t see Ronald Weasley or Skylar Potter at the Welcome Feast that night. He did however hear the most *baffling* story of a *flying* car. The next morning that story was confirmed true, in the form of a bright red Howler.

A roar of sound filled the huge hall, shaking dust from the ceiling which thankfully did not land in any food and for a minute it was so loud that Adrian couldn’t pick out any actual words.

“--Stealing the car, I wouldn’t have been surprised if they’d expelled you, you wait until I get a hold of you, I don’t suppose you stopped to think what your father and I went through when we saw it was gone--“

Mrs. Weasley’s voice seemed to be amplified many times over until the shrill woman could rattle the spoons and glasses of milk and pumpkin juice on the tables.

Adrian smiled and buttered his toast.

“--Letter from Dumbledore last night, I thought your father would die of shame, we didn’t bring you up to behave like this, you and Skylar could have died--“

Adrian almost laughed when he spotted Skylar slink lower in his seat. Draco let out a barely audible laugh.

“--Absolutely disgusted! Your father's now facing an inquiry at work and it's entirely your fault! If you put another toe out of line we’ll bring you straight back home!”

There was a loud ringing silence as the last word echoed off the stone walls. Then the howler burst into flames and curled into small ashes which landed in Ron’s porridge.

Adrian gently clicked his spoon against a glass cup, the sound loud and triggering a collection of

snickers up and down the table.

"*What if Master's father sent such loud paper*?" Lutain hissed, thoroughly amused although not looking to have understood everything in the Howler.

Adrian tried very hard not to think about it, but ultimately fell into snickers. He threw an apple at Draco whose jaw had dropped, having witnessed such a strange sight.

Transfiguration classes consisted of transforming a beetle into a button. Adrian waited patiently and timed his well, only when Daphne, the resident expert in transfiguration, managed to complete the change, did Adrian allow himself to do the same.

He had already been changing paper scraps into rats.

Defense Against the Dark Arts was indescribable.

Adrian was in utter shock when their new teacher, Lockhart, handed out a lengthy test filled with questions ranging from the most self-absorbed information (*What Is Gilderoy Lockhart's favourite food?)* to downright ridiculous.

Then, to top the class, the man had launched into a speech about how he was prepared to reveal to them their deepest darkest fears within the walls of the classroom.

Millicent was shaking with laughter by the time he was done.

"Behold!" He shouted dramatically. With a flourish, pulling a sparkling blue cloth from a large cage. "Cornish Pixies!"

Draco arched his eyebrow. "Pixies, sir?"

Lockhart nodded solemnly, not understanding the expressions of disbelief on Crabbe and Goyle's face and misinterpreted it as fear.

"Yes, Cornish Pixies, a truly heartless creature." He dramatically inhaled. "Let's see how you fare!"

Adrian scrambled to his feet as the small vicious blue creatures flew out in dizzying speeds. Lutain perked up, hissing and jerking his head wildly as too many creatures buzzed by for him to understand the heat signatures.

"Don't bite," Adrian bit out, snatching his wand and pointing it into the swarm. "Incendio."

He could have done it silently or wandlessly, but he didn't want to reveal his abilities with the media hound that was their new teacher.

A pixie let out a garbled cry as its wings burnt up and it landed on the floor. Millicent jumped over a desk and stomped the creature like a bug.

Draco used a freezing charm to get three of the pixies in the air at once. The creatures were moving in slow motion, Daphne easily snatched them and shoved them back in the cage.

"That's it!" Lockhart shouted eagerly, not taking a single step to actually help them. "Just like that! I'd do it myself, but--" He let out a loud chuckle, which grated on Adrian's nerves.

“Git,” Theo grunted, ducking nearby under a desk as one pixie snatched an inkwell and flung it his direction. “He wouldn’t know a single spell I bet!”

“*String him up like lights*,” Lutain hissed eagerly, spitting and hissing loudly enough to prevent pixies from getting too close to Adrian.

Adrian smiled and stared at Lockhart, focusing and exhaling slowly as his blood sang. Lockhart cried out suddenly as he was yanked upwards by invisible hands; he swung from the chandelier.

Adrian sent another pixie on fire. Theo and Blaise followed his example, lighting the small creature until the room was filled with gibberish shouting fireballs.

The clock struck, signaling the end of class. The Slytherins made a calculated retreat from the room, leaving Lockhart shouting for help with the assault of the remaining pixies.

If one of them *accidentally* lit him on fire, it *certainly* wasn’t Adrian’s fault.

Draco had boasted rather readily that his father had funded the Slytherin House team, supplying the team with new brooms for the upcoming Quidditch season.

Adrian himself hadn’t flown on a broom since he was young, very young in fact, and had no desire to do so again.

Draco had been pleased that he had been awarded the position of Seeker on the Slytherin team by Marcus Flint. Not only that, he had Pansy check out the Gryffindor Quidditch post times and gotten a signed letter from Snape, giving the team permission to take the field directly during Gryffindor practice times.

Adrian had looked at Draco flatly as the blond fool told Adrian of the plans. Draco had, after all, waved goodbye to the element of surprise the new brooms would’ve afforded them. In a dry voice, Adrian had asked, “Aren’t you taking this rivalry too far?”

“It’s *never* too far!”

They had returned after the practice, everyone much too pleased with themselves for just kicking off Gryffindor.

“What happened?” Theo asked eagerly, obviously sensing something different in the air.

“Weasley spelled himself!” Draco laughed. “You should have seen it! The idiot was belching slugs!”

Adrian looked at Draco in amazement. “ *Weasley?* As in, Ronald Weasley?” Draco nodded, snickering. “Considering he’s already on a tight leash, what in Merlin’s name did you say to get him that angry?”

Draco’s expression darkened. “The Granger girl said I *bought* my way onto the team!” Draco bit sharply. “I told her that she’s a *filthy mudblood* and--“

Adrian raised a hand, “You called her a *mudblood?”*

Theo let out a low whistle.

“Draco,” Adrian tried not to laugh. “I think Granger may call in a deal if she’s that upset. Or maybe Weasley--“

“He’s poor!” Draco squawked.

“You know I don’t *only* deal in gold.”

Adrian’s grin was spreading. Draco scowled and stood up and stomped to his room, leaving Theo staring at Adrian in speculation. “You *would* curse him, wouldn’t you?”

Adrian shrugged. “Someone needs to show him his place.”

Against Adrian’s expectations, neither of the two approached him. So instead he focused on his Occlumency shields; the four walls of defense were still developing but he was getting there.

The animagus potion was the true thing that had drawn his attention. To Owl Order it pre-made from Knockturn Alley was seven galleons, but he only had four to spare since business had been rather slow. He was walking in populated areas to get to class, hopeful that his presence would give someone the motivation to address him but nobody came his way and it was infuriating.

Adrian spent some time on the covered bridge after sunset. It was getting colder once again signaling winter was well on it’s way. It was also a good place to clear his mind and reign in emotional control behind the barriers he was creating.

He hadn’t found the strange sensation around Ginny. It had mysteriously vanished. He still had no idea what it was that could affect him so strongly yet no other, but it was almost always on his constant mind.

Lutain shivered under his robe, tightening against the cold.

“Let’s go inside,” Adrian sighed, turning and leaving the darkness of the covered bridge for the safety of the castle.

He was passing nearby the classrooms when he heard something strange, something whispery but foreign.

“*Master*?” Lutain hissed, poking his head out and scenting the air quickly. “*Master there is something big*.”

“What?” Adrian mumbled, walking closer to the wall and listening harder. “What is it?”

“ *I don’t know- -*“

“ *Come…Come to me …*”

Adrian flinched, head jerking back from the stone wall. His hands fluttered over the stone, trying to figure out where the old feminine voice was coming from. Lutain was scenting wildly; he too could not figure it out.

“*… Let me rip you …*”

“Where is it?” Adrian mumbled, eyes flickering over the shadows the torches casted. Was it a python? It sounded as big as Nagini for sure.

“*… Let me tear you …*”

Adrian glanced up and down the hallway, there wasn't anyone actually approaching.

"*Serpent*!" Adrian hissed as loudly as he dared, still trying to figure out *how* this creature was managing to avoid him so adeptly. "*Answer my call!*"

"*… Let me kill you …*"

The voice was faint. It trailed off and the hallway felt suddenly much colder than it had been before.

Adrian waited, sinking to the ground in disbelief and staring at the wall in front of him. He felt a vague sense of loss-- he was confident that whatever it was would yield to him. Did it not hear him?

" *Master, I do not scent it* ." Lutain flickered his tongue uneasy. " *Only wet earth* ."

Adrian leant forward, pressing his forehead against the stone just shy of a torch sconce.

What *was* that?

Click Here to see the fanart I hastily drew for the Second Year, featuring Adrian and the basilisk. (The fanart is more applicable for the later years of Hogwarts)

Legend

Chapter Summary

> Where curiosity killed the cat, Hermione becomes a nuisance, and Adrian needs to buy some Boomslang skin.

Chapter Notes

> Once again, thanks to my amazing Beta for going through and fixing a lot of my errors or repeated words. With how often I used the word 'Sighed', you'd think they all had asthma.
> I also want to mention for the sake of all of you who have read the original, that this story will be dark. Yes there will be sadness and death, but I also want to say that this version has so much more love and light in it than the original.

October drew nearer and the dampness around the Slytherin dungeons seemed ever more present. Even within the common room, with the sight of the great lake above them, the humidity and condensation seemed that much more present. The hissing green hearth-fires couldn't quite stave off the bite of the chill, made all the worse by the tiny collections of icicles adhered to the edges of the enchanted ceiling.

Madam Pomfrey began handing out potions to any student who succumbed to a chill or cold. The elder Slytherin's able to brew the potions themselves rented out the NEWT potions lab to brew them in mass production. Soon the entire common room was a fair trade of billowing steam from student's ears and the sharp spice of pepper.

The most interesting commotion in Adrian's venture to find the hissing voice was nearly being crushed by Peeves, the resident Poltergeist, who managed to drop a large cabinet and smash it just short of crushing students.

Lutain took to late night treks across the castle in search for the voice, allowing Adrian to stay up late into the night practicing his Occlumency, in which he was becoming quite proficient. His new night owl status caused Theo to become desperate-- he had resorted to conjuring bluebirds to wake him for classes.

The others discovered that Adrian's dark hair, almost blue hued in the light, sported a massive bed head when he didn't have time for vanity. A cowlick large enough for a crow to roost on.

The Halloween feast came around and once more the tall thestrals stood guard over the pumpkins, nearly the size of a garden shed. Lockhart seemed oblivious to the creatures and instead told an exaggerated story with a large turkey drumstick as a prop. The skeletal creatures watched the meat hungrily and followed it with their heads. It seemed odd that a man who had experienced so much, had yet to witness death firsthand.

Pansy noticed that the entire golden trio seemed to be missing from the table, something she

announced loudly for everyone to hear.

The others were quickly distracted by the Weasley Twin's contest of how many pumpkin pasties they could stuff into their mouth at one time.

"Disgusting," Draco grunted, sipping his grape juice with exaggerated daintiness to emphasise that at least *he* had class. The obvious reference to sipping Pureblood chilled wine was quickly abandoned in favor of the spiced pumpkin juice.

The feast ended with a loud choir formed of enchanted jack-o-lanterns, with bats billowing out from the orange faces to fly tornados above the student's heads. Theatrics were always pleasant; it reminded Adrian of the time Bellatrix had a bat become entangled in her wild hair.

The students filed out once the last of the entertainment ended. With the low rumble of hundreds of footsteps on stone and the hubbub of voices echoing off the hallway, they walked in small groups through the halls. Theo was entertaining the group of Draco, Crabbe, Goyle, Pansy, and Adrian himself with a tale of when his owl retrieved a real vampire bat and left it in his bedroom.

With little warning or little logic, the hoard suddenly stopped and grew quiet. Draco frowned and started to jump, attempting to see up over the heads of taller students and find out *why* the crowd had stopped and was now dead quiet.

Adrian sighed and spotted a nearby stocky Slytherin; the boy in question cleared a path and allowed the group to squeeze between tightly packed bodies.

There was blood on the wall. Glittering and shimmering in the haunted lighting. It had been *written*-- arced sloppily into bold letters--

The Chamber of Secrets has been opened. Enemies of the Heir beware.

Adrian felt his jaw slacking. To make the scene even more perplexing, a stiffened cat hung from a torch bracket, maybe somewhere in the state of rigor mortis. It certainly looked dead to Adrian.

All of this was *behind* the Golden Trio.

At least everyone knew where they had been during the feast. Practicing dark arts or necromantic sacrifices? Adrian had to give them credit, he didn't think they had it in them.

"Enemies of the Heir, beware!" Draco suddenly shouted, breaking the shocked silence that had fallen over the students. Malfoy's voice seemed that much louder because no-one else had dared make a sound. "You'll be next, mudbloods!"

Adrian shot his head around to stare at Draco in unrestrained shock, was the boy a *complete idiot*? Malfoy's complexion was fixed with a rosy flush, his face split with an excited grin as he eyed the cat.

The Chamber of Secrets?

What was *happening?*

"What's going on here!" A loud angry voice shouted as the unmistakably voice and body of Filch shoved his way through the crowd. He spotted the cat and he stumbled backwards; his hands curled inwards to his chest and trembled in dismay. "My cat! My cat! What's happened to Mrs. Norris!" He shrieked, and his eyes fell on the very guilty sight of Skylar Potter.

The cat was Filch's? Adrian hadn't ever spent time with the man, normally only Gryffindors were granted his company.

"You!" He screeched, hand pointing threateningly at the horrified Chosen One. "You! You've murdered my cat! You've killed her! I'll kill you! I'll--"

"Oh please," Pansy snickered under her breath. "I'd love to watch *that* fight."

"Argus!" Dumbledore had appeared, followed by a number of teachers who split the crowd to press against each wall of the passageway. "Come with me, Argus, and you Mr. Potter, Mr. Weasley, and Miss Granger."

Draco grinned as the four turned to walk away, only for Lockhart to stumble into the way with his bright velvet robes in an unsettling tone of pumpkin orange.

"My office is nearest, Headmaster-- just upstairs-- please feel free--"

"Thank you, Gilderoy," Dumbledore nodded and the entourage mournfully walked away, Filch clutching his stiffened cat in his arms.

"Two galleons that Granger did it," one slytherin piped up with a grin. "Those puffskeins don't know a spell to stun a butterfly."

"You think a *mudblood* would write that?" One asked in disgust. "You're denser than the Weasley if you think that."

"Oi! It would be a good cover! Nobody would suspect her!" The first boy defended.

The sudden interchanging of hushed suspicions and rumours filled the passageway with the susurrus of many voices. By the time the mob had diverged into specified houses, dozens of ideas and rumours were circulating.

The "attack" seemed to rattle everyone in the castle, even Slytherins grew wary of the other houses. Students and Prefects started approaching Adrian almost constantly, asking him for information about the attack. Most students wanted some sort of spell or object that would keep them safe from this invisible attacker.

Adrian also hadn't seen Hermione around the castle, which was strange considering she would most likely seek him out to find out what she didn't know. She had disappeared almost completely. Speaking to her house was useless; no Gryffindors were willing to talk with a Slytherin with tensions running so high.

The school in itself seemed to be avoiding Skylar. Whispers were being exchanged rapidly with no control or intended target.

'He's been trained by Dumbledore since he was very young..'

'He vanquished You-Know-Who, maybe like this-'

'Better stay away from him-'

'He'll be after you next-'

Adrian found most of the ideas hilarious. The mental image of Skylar Potter trying to avoid Bellatrix's *playdates* nearly left him hysterical.

After cashing in two deals, one with the Pavarti Gryffindor girl, Adrian *finally* found Hermione. Granted, she approached him outright, which made the two deals he cashed in entirely useless much to his own irritation.

Adrian hadn't know that it was common knowledge that he liked to watch the sunset when able from the northernmost covered bridge. A guilty pleasure, he supposed.

"Adrian," she greeted, looking thoroughly miffed and irritated by everything around. "I need to borrow a book."

"What a pleasant night it is," Adrian started,completely ignoring her request and rudeness. "What a wonderful sunset; all of those colours remind me of Lockhart's terrible wardrobe--"

"Do you have *Hogwarts: A History?"* She asked, lacking the *concept* of subtlety. She must have been desperate if she was asking for a book Adrian was almost positive she already owned.

Hermione approached him, crossing her arms with an impatient glance.

Adrian was taken aback by her exhaustion, she elaborated tiredly. "All of the copies have been taken out, and there's a two-week waiting list."

"I'm surprised you didn't bring your own copy."

She didn't ask how he knew she owned it. "There wasn't enough space with all of Lockhart's books."

Adrian snorted and Hermione whacked him on the side.

"Alright alright," Adrian held up his hands in defense. "*Why* do you want that book?"

She looked surprised, "The same reason as everyone else wants it: to read up on the legend of the Chamber of Secrets."

Adrian blinked slowly. As much as people had been talking about it, Adrian shamefully knew next to nothing about it. "What is it? Specifics, not rumors."

"That's just it, I can't remember." Hermione bit her lip. "And I can't find the story anywhere else--"

Adrian lifted his hand and frowned, thinking. The Chamber of Secrets, somehow it felt familiar but he couldn't *recall*--

"I'm calling in my debt," Adrian stated, holding out his wand which Hermione tentatively took; she gasped when the flare of heat snaked up her arm, leaving it tingling.

"Don't tell your classmates where I'm going to take you and of what happens."

Hermione looked confused but nodded. Adrian turned on his heel, already starting to walk down the bridge back into the castle. He took the first downward staircase, already starting the trek.

They continued further and further until Hermione recognized where the troll had chased them the year before. She gasped and pointed at a specific suit of armor, dented slightly on its metallic surface. Adrian didn't even glance in the direction.

Adrian found the small snake in the wall, eying them indifferently until he clearly stated "Purple Heather."

The wall started to move with the sound of stone grinding on stone, pulling back on some hidden, probably magical hinge. Adrian stepped inside the entryway, nearly leaving Hermione scrambling to follow inside. It was late enough at night that the room wasn't too overpopulated, although the low buzz of conversations abruptly halted.

They stared at Hermione each with varying levels of distaste and outlandish surprise.

"What the--" One started, jaw dropping into an unfortunately ugly expression.

"What's the mud--" Draco started, springing upwards from a couch on the right with an accusing finger already pointed in their direction.

"Is Carmen in?" Adrian interrupted, rolling his shoulders and feeling one crack under the movement. "Someone find Carmen."

One fifth year vanished up the staircase, poking her head into one room and calling for the person in question.

Adrian spoke louder. "Carmen! I'm calling in our deal!"

The room was quiet once again, a few people looking forward eagerly.

"What in Merlin's name..." A fourth year groaned, "How did the kid get *Carmen* to make one of those bloody deals?"

"Reckon it was for something good? If not I'm cursing that mudblood out myself," someone else muttered.

Hermione noticeably shrank behind Adrian, her hand shaking on her wand.

Carmen popped her head out and around the doorframe of the upstairs room. She blinked in surprise, arched one eyebrow, and looked at Hermione. "You brought a *Lion*?"

"Ignore her," Adrian said. "I'll get one of you in their common room sometime."

One student whooped loudly at the idea of sabotaging the Gryffindors in their own *home.*

"You know where the common room is and you've been holding out on us?" Carmen pouted, then sighed. "Of *course* you do. Should have told us after *they* took our Cup last year."

Adrian offered his wand, at this point most people knew the drill. Carmen walked down the steps, reaching out without hesitation to grasp the end.Her lip twitched slightly, signifying she felt the magic race along her arm.

"Alright kid, what do you want?" She said, crossing her arms yet thankfully not addressing the terrified Gryffindor behind him. Carmen was significantly more lenient compared to the recently graduated Vaisley.

"She's under a deal," Adrian pointed over his shoulder at Hermione. "And you're the Prefect. You're almost as much as a bookworm as her--"

There were a few mumbles of agreement, causing Carmen to flush although not in embarrassment.

Adrian lifted his chin slightly, jutting it outwards unconsciously similar to Draco. "Tell us the story of the Chamber of Secrets."

There was a low whistle from a sixth year.

"*All* of them?" Carmen pouted, looking put out, "Come on, kid--"

"Do it Carmen," One laughed. "You're lucky more aren't back yet."

She grumbled something under her breath, stalking across the room to grab a chair from an unoccupied desk.

On cue, chairs and couches rotated or in one case, levitated to form a circle around the exasperated Carmen.

"You're a real menace, you know that?" Carmen huffed, sitting backwards on her chair and resting her chin on her forearm. Adrian motioned for Daphne to slide to the side of her couch to accommodate two more.

Hermione, still rather scared was totally absorbed in what Carmen was about to say.

"Alright fine," she started, turning to try an address everyone. "As you all know or *better* know by now, Hogwarts was founded over a thousand years ago by two witches and two wizards. The four worked together to build the castle and in honor each of the houses are named after the founders: Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and our own noble house, Salazar Slytherin."

The Slytherins broke into cheers, a startling amount of noise for roughly thirty people in the misshapen circle. The display of house pride was unexpected to Hermione, generally Slytherins were composed and rather aristocratic in public.

"Settle down!" Carmen shouted annoyed. "Or I'm quitting now! The legend goes on something like this: as time went on and the little details were picked out, Slytherin stuck to his own ideas. Slytherin wanted to be more selective about students and that all magical teachings should *only* be taught to all-magic families!"

There were quite a few who looked at Hermione, who was beginning to regret coming to Adrian for help.

"He didn't want to take Mudbloods under his wing, because in that time muggles liked to *kill wizards,*" she hissed out, throwing out her arm for theatrics sake. "So those born to muggles weren't trustworthy and they *still* aren't trustworthy!"

More cheers, and Adrian pulled his wand, shifting his body language towards Hermione. Adrian doubted anyone was going to do anything, although it would be a spectacular story to try and explain to Professor Snape.

"Eventually Gryffindor and Slytherin had a fight, a duel or an argument or *something,* and Slytherin was kicked out of Hogwarts! So Slytherin built a hidden chamber in the castle, one that none of the other founders knew of. Slytherin sealed the Chamber of Secrets so that *nobody* would be able to open it until his own true heir arrived. The heir alone would open the Chamber of Secrets, unleash the monsters within, and use it to purge the school of *all* mudbloods!"

That sounded ridiculous in Adrian's point of view. If that was truly the case, why wouldn't the Chamber have been opened during Grindelwald's time, when the muggle's were *actually* being a threat?

Adrian stood abruptly, stretching lazily and giving a small nod to signify he was satisfied. Carmen

politely gave him a rude gesture, abandoning her chair to get back to whatever homework he had taken her from. Hermione stumbled upwards quickly, eager to leave the room. The other students began reorienting the room back to its natural position, dragging the chairs across the ground.

“Where do you think you’re going!” Millicent blurted, jumping to her feet and clumsily knocking over the chair she had been sitting on. “Leading a Gryffindor here, inside the Common room, and not only that but she’s a *filthy*--“

“Step aside, Bulstrode,” Adrian commanded, rubbing his temple with one hand. The other gripped his wand in his sleeve. “We’ve already established that you do what I say.”

Millicent stormed right up and too close for Adrian’s comfort. “What’cha gonna do about it, *orphan*?”

Adrian’s cheek twitched and his eyes narrowed. There were a few whooping sounds as students turned to see the exchange-- the story of the burning Bulstrode was something of a classic. A prime example of tiny first years decking it out.

“I’m saying that you should step aside, and we won’t have any *unfortunate* accidents.”

Millicent’s breath was directly on Adrian’s face. Her nostrils flared like an ox. “How about, *no.”*

Adrian’s grip on his wand tightened. Hermione moved behind him, likely reaching for her own wand.

“I said,” Adrian paused, feeling the swell of magic under his call, moving with the current of his aggression, “*move.”*

Millicent shouted and paused dumbly. It took a moment for her to process the situation before she dropped to the floor-- her green and black knitted Slytherin scarf was smoldering hotly. Not full out fire, but the uncomfortable heat around her throat.

The Slytherin common room was filled with the enthusiastic clapping of the minority who had been paying attention. The others jumped, peering around in confusion, then disappointment, as they realized they missed yet another feud. Adrian pulled Hermione out through the common room, thankful that the confrontation had happened inside the room. Hermione gave a full body shiver as the magic set the deal in place.

“Your deal is set,” Adrian’s voice was suspiciously blank, his eyes dull and looking far too distant. “You won’t be able to tell anyone about the events that happened inside, good luck finding a book for Potter.”

“W-*wait.”* She garbled out, clutching his arm tightly. “You-- I didn’t know that you’re an orph--”

“*Don't*,” Adrian growled out, glaring at he with a menacing look which made her breathless. “I left *them,* not the other way around.”

“Like-- emancipation?” Hermione seemed confused. She stumbled, eyes widening in shock. “Were they... were they *bad* to you?”

Adrian’s jaw creaked as his teeth pressed harshly together. Hermione twitched as she *finally* realized she was on testy grounds.

Adrian pulled his arm free and walked past her, Hermione stumbled in worry and mostly confusion. “Wait! Where are you going!”

“Owlery,” Adrian grunted, not even dignifying her to pause. “To send a letter.”

“At *this* time?” She questioned, baffled and sounding a bit lost.

Dear Merlin did he have to do *everything*?

She followed him a safe distance, only until she recognized her surroundings and diverged off towards her own tower. Adrian continued to the Owlery, writing a quick letter on the free parchment provided in the building. Bellatrix would know something about this madness; it seemed right up her alley to know something about monsters out to eat mudbloods.

He didn’t receive a letter back, much to his dismay. Hedwig returned happy though, so she must have mooched decent food off of Rabastan’s plate again.

On the bright side, knocking down his reputation in Slytherin had given him *another* deal with Hermione, although this time not in his favour.

It was barely a week later when she came running to him in a corridor, wanting to ‘purchase’ a deal like it was muggle currency.

He was starting to regret gaining her infallible trust the prior year.

This time she wanted him to *somehow* obtain shredded Boomslang skin and powdered bicorn horn, potion ingredients he didn’t have on hand.

He stared at her, and she shrugged with an uneasy smile.

“Will you be paying for this, this time?’ Adrian sighed, scratching behind his ear as he thought. The ingredients would be expensive, normally debts only qualified for the service of obtaining them, they didn’t include the price of the items themselves.

“We can pay!” Hermione blurted. “We just need a little of each!”

‘We.’ That meant he was assisting the Golden Trio once again. Spectacular.

Adrian looked at the two ingredients and thought about what they could be used for. “Alright, I’ll get them to you and you pay once I deliver. Boomslang skin will be harder, it's normally a galleon per vial, you’re lucky I know somewhere I can get it for fifteen sickles.”

“We just need them soon.” Hermione blushed, looking at her feet unsure.

‘We’ again. The Golden Trio was on something time sensitive, which likely meant they were brewing potions or trying rune-based rituals. Considering the shared intelligence of the group, potions was much more likely. He couldn’t help but wonder *why* they were they brewing *potions?*

He still had the lists of Knockturn Alley stores that allowed order by Owl, he could easily purchase the ingredients and be reimbursed at a later time. The benefit was now he *knew* the group was attempting something.

He wished Bella would get back to him already, he had questions still.

Soar

Chapter Summary

> Where Adrian goes flying, Daphne digs a bit too deep, and tattoo's aren't very intelligent.

Chapter Notes

> Hello one and all!
> This chapter is un-beta'd, so all spelling errors are completely my fault. I was in a rush today to publish.
>
> Consider this a Happy Birthday present to you all!

The highly anticipated Quidditch match between Slytherin and Gryffindor quickly outshone Millicent's illuminating challenge. Her injuries around her neck healed with a burn salve given to her by an entertained seventh year. Her embarrassment worked better than flesh eating slug repellent, Adrian had barely seen her in days.

Hermione seemed more vocal and courageous after the Slytherin stunt. Often she searched him out just to compare essays or other meager requests. Through mutual 'friends', he had slowly been introduced to more Gryffindors. The Weasley Twins enjoyed his deal service and often asked questions on the parameters, although nothing had been agreed on. Adrian had a small suspicion he'd have to start figuring out how to owl order alcohol into the castle.

Draco had become grouchier, sleep deprived and anxious for the first match. Daphne casted delicate charms to disguise the bags under his eyes, clicking her tongue at his horrid state all the while.

The Saturday morning of the match, the entire Slytherin team vanished from the dorms. Blaise assured the frantic Pansy, that it was simply a house tradition. Bad luck to the team if they were spotted out of uniform.

As eleven O'clock drew closer and tensions rose alongside, the entire school drifted to the cloudy outdoors and onto the tall stands surrounding the field. A few spells were casted by the Hogwarts official, to redirect lightning in the unfortunate chance the sky became muggy halfway through.

Pansy had latched herself onto Adrian's arm, searching for the first replacement for Draco she could find. Her hair was pinned up to her head and bounced with her excited footsteps as she guided him onto the pitch.

"Dray is *amazing,"* She swooned, anxiously rambling to dispel her own worry, "He's so *fast..."*

"Do *you* play, Adrian?" Daphne asked, looking more dignified with her reserved walk, "I don't believe I've heard your stories."

Adrian grimaced slightly and selected his words mindfully, "I am... *aware,* of the rules and regulations. I know how to fly a broom, although I haven't since I was very young."

Daphne hummed, kicking a smell pebble with her foot, "So your biological parents were purebloods?"

Adrian stopped walking sharply; this caused Pansy to squawk out as she nearly tripped. Daphne continued walking a few steps, pausing before looking over her shoulder with a carefully formed bored expression.

The hairs on Adrian's neck rose as he scrutinized the pureblood heir before him. Caution and paranoia twisted his stomach into an uneasy misshapen knot.

"I believe that is personal, Greengrass."

Daphne smiled politely with the grace and poise of a trained woman, "My mistake, Adrian. I wasn't aware you consider *any* information too personal," her eyes shifted flintily, "or perhaps the proper coin is in order for your trade?"

Pansy whined loudly, tugging pettily at Adrian's sleeve. Her determination to get to the stands halted the confrontation and the imminent argument, despite how artfully Daphne phrased it.

The crowd of older students near the base slid apart to allow the three to meet with Theo, Crabbe, and Goyle, already near the top of the bleachers. Theo wore a thick green scarf which emphasized the thin hollows of his cheeks.

"Where's Draco?" Pansy inquired, rising onto the tips of her feet to try and see Draco on the pitch. The distance rendered the entire team as a collection of indistinct blurs of green and silver.

Once the Gryffindors walked onto the pitch, swathed in gold and crimson, they were greeted by cheers and applause; Slytherin house began hissing loudly in mockery.

The match began instantly; Draco flew well and agilely on his new broom, a platinum haired streak of speed and acrobatics.

Not long thereafter, the sky gurgled behind angry dark clouds. The weather shifted, and released buckets of shivering cold rain.

Pansy squealed, raising the hood of her cloak to try and protect her hair and skin. Adrian grimaced and followed suit. Against his best efforts, the rain plastered his hair flat to his head. Daphne tilted her wand upwards and casted a translucent umbrella to protect her corn silk hair.

Theo twitched, splashing water off his face onto Goyle who blinked dumbly at the suddenly cold.

"That bludger sure does like Potter," Blaise muttered, squinting through the rain with enhanced binoculars. He was mutely surprised Blaise had enough foresight to charm them against the rain; Adrian could barely see the seeker's shape in the sky.

"Did someone charm it?" Daphne frowned, peering from under her umbrella, "It's not moving properly."

Pansy sniffed insulted, "it's not like Draco needs *help-"*

Adrian frowned and tilted his head curiously. He hadn't ever refreshed his memory on the rules of Quidditch; what small tidbits he knew were mostly the simplified versions for children. Obviously

tampering with any of the equipment would be a huge regulation, especially with how dangerous the sport already was.

"Looks strange, don't it?" Theo muttered out loud absentmindedly. He nudged Adrian in his side eagerly, "It looks *pretty* strange-"

There was a hollow gasp throughout the stadium as Skylar's outstretched arm was smashed into by a bludger. Although Adrian couldn't discern the action, the announcer was rapid fire explaining how the bludger had broken its spellwork to execute such a maneuver. Someone *had* tampered with the equipment.

Draco didn't let the clear sign of tampering disturb him. He swept in quickly, his naturally skinnier body slid past Skylar's with ease.

Pansy jerked beside him, placing her hands on her hips as her face puckered in a look of irritation. Other students glanced back to locate him in the rain, eyeing him curiously.

"I didn't do anything," Adrian defended sourly," I have no deals for enchanting a bludger. I honestly don't know the rules of Quidditch that well."

"We best fix that, get you on a broom." Theo responded distractedly, his eyes locked on Skylar who was now on the ground. The final whistle was called as Draco ensnared the golden sphere, triggering the end of the match. The teaching staff swept onto the field, Lockhart was distinguishable by his bright yellow robes.

"You'd like to see that, wouldn't you?" Adrian grunted, rising onto the tips of his shoes to look over the other heads, "Me on a broom, I have better things to do."

Theo's mouth quirked into a shark like grin, "Eight sickles Draco takes you flying."

Adrian turned and looked at Theo with a distinctly unimpressed expression, "You just want to see me look like an idiot."

Theo shrugged although he was genuine as he spoke.

"I actually just want to see you fly. Can't imagine you doing it, and Merlin knows it would cheer up Draco. Maybe liven things up a bit around here since all that Chambers of Secrets shite."

"I don't think you can fly," Daphne added in charmingly, "I'll throw in a Galleon."

Theo gave Adrian a meaningful look.

"That's a bit of gold there, Harry."

Adrian flinched violently and glared at Theo, "*Don't* call me that."

Daphne tilted her head in a formal nod and smiled.

Gryffindor won the match unfortunately even while Skylar suffered the consequence of Lockhart's mediocre excuse of spell work. The scored points before Draco ended the match leant in Gryffindor's favor.

The Slytherin team instead told stories of Skylar's unfortunate ailment over and over, each retelling becoming more and more preposterous. It was shared in the common room with laughter and smuggled pints of Butterbeer; they may have lost but Potter was trapped in Hospital Wing for a

week.

Draco, once informed by a suave Greengrass, was *thrilled* with Adrian's deal. As unorthodox as it was in comparison to Adrian's usual careful bartering, he was rather trapped in. Galleons for humiliation and ridicule.

Hermione had better enjoy those premium ingredients, that's what those coins were being used for.

Adrian was escorted outside onto the Quidditch pitch by a small train of eager bystanders. Most were other yearmates, although a few fifth years and Ravenclaws trailed behind.

They didn't have any of the Quidditch team's balls or equipment, the team was rather paranoid with meddling after *someone* bewitched the Gryffindor's bludger to target Skylar. Instead, Daphne offered to shoot sparks or other illusions into the air for Draco to weave between. The intention was to teach Adrian the finer aspects of flying, although Draco could only avoid flaunting for so long.

"You hold the broom like *this,"* Draco instructed, grasping his broom in a peculiar fashion, "Although I always have a reverse grip since it makes it easier to dive suddenly..."

Adrian glanced pitifully at Theo. Theo shook a handful of coins in his fist, rattling them audibly.

Pansy handed the spare broom to Adrian. It was one of the Nimbus Two Thousand and One's, sleek and more streamline than anything Adrian had ever used. Likely more expensive than the entire Gryffindor team's stock put together.

Racing and Quidditch brooms were built with a series of safeguards and regulations. Knowing the Slytherin team, Adrian wouldn't be surprised if all those securities were disabled.

Bellatrix was going to *kill him* if he fell.

Draco mounted his broom with well-practiced ease and secured his hands in the unique grip. He settled and watched Adrian patiently although expectantly.

Adrian tightened his fist unsurely on the broom- it felt too flimsy to support his weight.

He could only imagine Lutain laughing at him, the snake would be nearly hysterical at Adrian's uncharacteristic fear.

With a slow exhale and a few internal curse words, he stepped over the tail end of the broom. His foot secured on the other side. Now straddling the charmed wood, he glanced at Draco who visibly brightened at seeing his cooperation.

Draco hunched forward slightly, keeping his feet firmly on the ground although poised r to jump at a moment's notice; Adrian mimicked his position although he didn't find it by any means comfortable.

"Push off with your feet, careful not to yank up on the broom." Draco advised, gently floating into the air in demonstration. He overemphasized his movements, showing how to twist and angle his direction.

Adrian pushed off with a feather light hop. There was a gut-wrenching moment where Adrian was *sure* he was going to teeter sideways and crash to the ground.

The broom held him aloft, he released the breath he had been holding.

Draco slid next to Adrian and reached across to angle the broom handle upwards. Adrian followed the movement, marveling as they begin ascending higher into the air.

The miniscule crowd below cheered as they finally reached the bottom rim of the lowest goal post.

"You're not bad at this," Draco noted relaxed. He withdrew his hand, slinking back several paces to allow Adrian to spin in a lazy circle.

"Not bad at spinning like a show-kneazle?" Adrian dryly snarked, unsettled by all the eyes watching his movements.

Adrian tested the brooms capabilities to sharply rise. The broom handle jerked upwards and smacked into his face, nearly triggering a bloody nose.

Draco chuckled at the movement, darting forward to grab his shaft and tug it back parallel to the ground below.

It took half an hour for Adrian to adequately maneuver the broom. At such a point Draco tailed him through small turns and dives.

"Want to make this more fun?" Draco asked, pulling out a galleon from his pocket. The large golden coin caught the mid-afternoon sun and shone brightly.

Adrian bitterly thought how unfair it was that all purebloods had so many galleons to *throw* around.

Draco dropped it.

Adrian watched the gold plummet, in horror. With a split second of hesitation, he pondered the benefit of chasing the coin. It was highly unlikely that he would be injured, especially with Draco watching so avidly. Without thinking any further on the matter, Adrian shoved the hand highest on the broom downwards with his body weight. It turned, nearly flipping him off his mount. The sudden direction change was nauseating, as well as the sudden acceleration. He blinked rapidly, searching for the falling coin desperately.

He caught up to the falling coin in seconds utilizing the broom's spectacular speed Adrian hadn't realized how high the two had ascended; his sudden dive still granted him plenty of time to pull out of the movement.

Draco was at his side instantly, "Not bad." Draco appraised with good intent.

Adrian glared and exhaled through his nose slowly to quell his churning stomach, "I don't think Quidditch is for me."

"Shame, you have a good build for seeker, although terrible posture. Maybe you could be my understudy."

Adrian threw the galleon at Draco's head.

They kept up at it for an exhaustingly long while, until Adrian's ears were burning from the sudden climbs and falls through the air. Draco's eyes were looking red. They hadn't brought any of the protective goggles.

Once Adrian got past investing his trust in a stick of enchanted wood, flying was *amazing*.

He wondered why they hadn't created a spell for flying without the aid of a creature or a broom.

The ability to twist in the air unaided like a thunderbird would be something of legends.

The duo landed, Adrian stumbling more so than Draco. Adrian received his money from Theo and Daphne, counting it absentmindedly on the palm of his wind torn hand.

He was still enclosed in the dizzying exhilarating of flying, the blinding rush that falling unaided somehow triggered. His stomach wasn't following the same sort of euphoria; in fact, it was protesting loudly to his recklessness in sick murmurs and short acting cramps.

"You've flown before," Daphne mentioned calmly. Too calmly.

Adrian hadn't caught it, mind struggling out of its trance. Daphne tilted her head curiously, eyes wide in innocent fascination. "Were you better than your brother?"

"Merlin no, I-" Adrian cut off, sharply, his tone and word faltering as rapidly as he had said them. His mind caught up, snapping into its state of normal awareness as he registered her question.

Oh, Merlin no.

Theo's eyes widened as he looked between the two in shock, "But I thought you were an orphan?"

The tension flying had released returned with the viciousness of an entrapped cobra.

Draco stepped between the pureblood and Adrian. He raised his wand subtly, in a pointed warning. "This isn't the time or the place..."

There was an indiscernible sound in the distance, growing louder in its repetitiveness. A single form raced down from the castle, repeating Draco's name over and over.

Millicent's eyes were wide with a mixture of fear and excitement, like a child caught smuggling something dangerous. Her nostrils flared as she breathed heavily, repeating over and over her mantra as she grew closer.

"Breathe," Draco sighed, looking shrewdly unsettled by her composure, "What do you want?"

"They found another frozen! But this time it's a kid!" She gasped out between heavy pants.

"What?" Daphne gasped, hand flying to her mouth in surprise, "A student?"

"A Gryffindor first year," Millicent nodded, looking very pleased despite her exhaustion, "The kid who took photos. Get this- his camera? It *melted."*

Theo looked alarmed and looked at Adrian with growing dread, "You know any monster that does that?"

Adrian blinked and shook his head, in surprise. His head struggled to catch up, drawing a blank under the expectant expressions. "A- A Zorono? A persian dragon...any drawings of it will combust but *this?"* Adrian trailed off awkwardly, nearly flushing in embarrassment. He truly didn't know any sort of beast that damaged magical film.

Theo gulped, and Adrian felt annoyingly helpless.

"We're Slytherin's, right?" Theo hopefully contributed, "So it won't attack Slytherin students, yeah?"

Once again, eyes were on him for answers to something he didn't know.

"I don't *know-"*

Adrian paused and felt a disgustingly surreal sensation of something sliding out of his skin.

"I've sent a letter to my father," Draco sniffed, "I haven't gotten an owl back."

"Neither I." Pansy scowled, tapping her foot against the ground impatiently.

Adrian tried not to squirm as he felt something emerge completely out of his waist; it encircled his body twice before it moved towards and around his thigh.

"On the bright side," Millicent spoke up, having finally regained her breath, "I heard Lockhart is making a duelling club,"

"Are you serious?" Draco blinked, before his eyes alit with something devious, "Chances to mess with the Gryffindors? Oh, this will be memorable."

"Gotta stock up on humiliating spells," Theo chimed in, wriggling in place excitedly. His anxiety behind the attack had vanished, or at least seemed to be repressed.

"I'd love to see Potter barf slugs." Pansy sighed dreamily, clinging to Draco's arm with a malicious grin.

Millicent looked grudgingly at Adrian, "You know any good spells?"

Adrian's mind whirred quickly. Spells, he *knew* spells.

Something embarrassing or humiliating...something that would take a considerable amount of time to reverse…

Slowly a smile spread across his face. It was disconcertingly dark, "I have an idea actually."

Adrian returned to his room and locked the door behind him. He immediately approached the large mirror- something Theo transfigured, and removed his clothing.

He threw his cloak and shirt onto the bed with reckless abandon. Torchlight shimmered over his skin, reflecting off undulating scales of magic ink. The Nagini tattoo flexed accordingly, her head trailed over his ribs and stomach.

"Master?" Lutain slid out of the hole on the side of his heated crate, *"You are back from being a bird?"*

Adrian didn't he trailed his own fingers over the inked head of Nagini. Although there was no textural difference, she arched into his touch.

"Hello," Adrian hissed, considering the mirror directly to see the reptilian eyes, *"What are you doing here Nagini?"*

She flickered her tongue, *"Message."*

Its hiss was distorted and feminine, not at all like the serpent's real voice.

"From my father?" Adrian inquired with the barest traces of longing. He hadn't been in contact with the man, he hadn't spoken to it as often as he desired. He wanted to ask and learn *so much,* but not through these circumstances. There was something about using a messenger engraved into his own

flesh, that felt somehow violating.

"Did Bellatrix get my owl?"

It paused in thought, hindered by its low intelligence. It was surreally like speaking to Lutain the first time he had met the serpent.

"Chamber of Secrets open before."

Adrian gasped audibly in surprise. Of *course* it had, it would have had to be in history at some point if it was making such a ruckus.

"When? I thought only the Heir of Slytherin could open it... Is there another heir? There's a monster I heard in the walls..." Adrian trailed off, growing more uncomfortable with the conversation the longer it was one sided.

"Open long ago." it whispered simply, *"No open now."*

Oh Merlin, it's intelligence was even worse than Lutain. It didn't seem to have trouble comprehending information, although Adrian couldn't be certain of how much was being recited.

"Why not now?" A different voice hissed curiously.

Lutain had slid over, able to comprehend the hisses of the mark and respond accordingly.

"Why can't the chamber open now?" Lutain ventured to ask, flicking his own tongue close enough to tickle Adrian's navel.

The tattoo peered at Lutain curiously from beneath Adrian's flesh.

"No speak. Speak open chamber."

Adrian furrowed his brow and chewed his lip thoughtfully.

"A speaker must open the chamber? There's another speaker in Hogwarts?"

The tattoo flicked its tongue as it took moments to register Adrian's word. It nodded politely, resulting in a perturbing sensation of movement pushing against his abdomen.

"The monster is a snake," Lutain hissed gleefully, enamored with the possibility of another beast.

"A large serpent of noble kind! Master!"

Things weren't matching up. Only the Heir of Slytherin could open the chamber… that required whoever it was to be a Parselmouth. If the ability to speak parseltongue was a direct lineage skill, which it seemed to be, it would imply that Adrian was now the Heir of Slytherin. Unless it was inherited as a title, where it could only be bestowed by another speaker already.

But Adrian had met Lutain before he was ever adopted by his father. Did that mean that there were more parseltongue speakers out there? Adrian was under the impression the gift was incredibly rare.

"Tell my father," Adrian paused hesitantly. What did he want to say to the man? What was there *to* say?

If parseltongue marked a distinct trait of the Heir of Slytherin, and the one who opened the

Chamber *had* to be a speaker...

"Lutain," Adrian breathed excitedly, his mind whirred with the perfect way to ridicule Potter.

"I need you to do a favour."

Polyjuice

Chapter Summary

> Where Lockhart really isn't that bright, Skylar apparently is bilingual, and Adrian really hates being tricked

Chapter Notes

> So sorry for the long delay.
> On the bright side, I now have my own Lutain, although much more chubby and much less dangerous.

The shipment of boomslang skin and powdered bicorn horn arrived in the grip of a ratty, tawny eagle. It snapped its beak twice at Goyle and stole some of Crabbe's egg.

The packaging was secure and within hours Hermione was handing over the money for the purchase. The ingredients weren't easy to find, but with this payment, Adrian *finally* had enough to purchase the animagus potion.

His Occlumency shields increased every day, proceeding along with his carefully timed plans.

He had already talked to Draco, who affirmed that if Snape (who was the assistant to Lockhart for the dueling club) chose a volunteer, it would almost certainly be Draco. The other "volunteer" would definitely be chosen by Lockhart: Skylar Potter, the *celebrity*.

The only uncertainty, Draco confessed, was if Snape was intending to see Skylar embarrassed*;* if that was the case, the potions professor would call on Adrian himself.

The idea was both flattering and unsettling.

In the days leading up to the Dueling Club's first meeting, Adrian spent his time in the library scouring through nearly every book he could on references to snakes or snake creatures.

He had marked off Atups, small winged serpents who lived in deserts, able to glide over long distances. Nehustans and Runespoors were added to his implausible list. Adrian didn't know if Parseltongue expanded outwards to encapsulate serpentine species of dragons and other reptiles. Sea Serpents weren't actually related to the snakes Adrian knew he could speak to; would his ability reach the smooth skinned variants?

He still didn't know *how* such a large monster was moving throughout the castle, the Creevy boy and the cat were found in two entirely different areas of the castle. Whatever it was, it could move invisibly through the school. Perhaps there was a species which could camouflage itself?

Adrian didn't have time to venture into that territory, he was busy searching for simple spells which could properly humiliate an opponent, just in case.

The Dueling Club was an event to see. Nearly all of the Slytherins turned up to watch Snape duel against their least favourite teacher on staff. The Great Hall had been altered, all of the tables and furniture removed with the exception of a tall golden platform. Candles floated high above shining on the excited students below.

Gilderoy Lockhart walked onto the stage, resplendent in deep plum robes. Snape was wearing his usual black, looking frustrated with his teaching companion.

"Gather round, gather round!" Lockhart shouted out, waving his arms excitedly. "Can everyone see me? Can you all hear me?"

"Unfortunately," Theo grimaced, causing Crabbe to snigger.

"Now! Professor Dumbledore has kindly granted me permission to start this little dueling club, to train you all up in case you ever need to defend yourselves as I myself have done on countless occasions- for full details, see my published works. Let me introduce my assistant, Professor Snape," He flourished to the scowling man. "He tells me he knows a tiny little bit about dueling himself and has sportingly agreed to help me with a short demonstration before we begin. Now, I don't want any of you youngsters to worry; you'll still have your Potions master when I'm through with him, never fear!"

Snape's upper lip was curling. It was wonder that Lockhart was still happy; Adrian couldn't imagine anyone willingly dueling Snape and still seeming pleased.

Lockhart and Snape turned to face each other and bowed. At least Lockhart did, with an unnecessary flourish, while Snape just jerked his head shortly. They both raised their wands like swords in front of them, shifting their stances, turning to present a smaller target.

"As you see, we are holding our wands in the accepted combative position!" Lockhart instructed the quiet crowd. "On the count of three, we will cast our first spells. Neither of us will be aiming to kill, of course."

"A shame," Draco muttered under his breath.

Lockhart counted down and both swung their wands above their heads and pointed them at their opponent. Snape shouted a disarming charm before Lockhart could do so much as inhale. Lockhart flew backwards off the stage and slid onto the floor in an undignified sprawl. His wand went spinning off into the crowd.

Malfoy and Pansy cheered loudly.

Lockhart stumbled upright onto his feet. "Well, there you have it!" He stated, tottering back onto the raised platform. "That was a Disarming Charm, as you see, I've lost my wand- ah, thank you." He smiled to a Gryffindor first year who eagerly handed it to him. "An excellent idea to show them that, Professor Snape, but if you don't mind my saying so, it was very obvious what you were about to do. If I had wanted to stop you it would have been only too easy. However, I felt it would be instructive to let them see…"

Snape looked murderous. Lockhart noticed, because he quickly shouted. "But enough demonstrating! I'm going to come amongst you now and put you all into pairs!"

Snape strode over to Skylar instantly and beckoned Draco. "Perhaps a demonstration before the students are throwing jinxes?"

"Of course!" Lockhart stumbled, helping the unprepared and wincing Skylar up onto the golden

stage. "A wonderful idea!"

Draco took a few steps to pass Adrian, pausing and wincing as Adrian smilingly offered his hand. Draco took it, and Lutain slid through the clasped hands around the arm of Draco.

"*He is humid, Master*." Lutain hissed from Draco's arm, "*He smells of fear*."

"Don't worry, he won't bite." Adrian murmured. "Well, not you at least."

Draco nodded and walked up to the other end of the stage. Adrian squeezed around the crowd, trying to orient himself halfway down the length of the stage as near as he could get.

"Face your partners!" Lockhart shouted, "And bow!"

Skylar and Malfoy barely inclined their heads, not taking their eyes off each other.

"Wands at the ready!" Shouted Lockhart. "When I count to three, cast your charms to disarm your opponents- only to disarm them! We don't want any accidents. One...two.."

Skylar swung his arm up but Malfoy had already casted his spell on two. His spell hit Skylar so hard he stumbled backwards. Skylar responded accordingly, shouting, "Rictusempra!"

A jet of silver light hit Malfoy in the stomach and he doubled over, wheezing.

"I said disarm!" Lockhart shouted. "Disarm!"

Malfoy sunk to his knees. Skylar looked unsure, and Malfoy took this chance to choke out, "Tarantallegra!"

Skylar yelped as his legs jerked around him in an obscure, uncontrollable dance.

"Stop!" Screamed Lockhart, but Snape took charge.

"Finite Incantatem!" Intoned the potions professor. Malfoy stopped wheezing and Skylar's legs stopped trembling.

"Perhaps, it would be best to teach the students how to *block* spells?" Snape drawled, watching as Lockhart flushed red and rushed to Skylar's aid.

"Now, Skylar," Lockhart started. He smiled dazzlingly. "When Draco points his wand at you, you do this-"

He made a complex movement with his wand and ultimately dropped it.

Malfoy made eye contact with Adrian and gave a short nod.

"Three... two... one... go!" Lockhart shouted.

Malfoy raised his arm, his sleeve low enough Adrian could only see the end of his wand. He shouted out, "Serpensortia!"

The spell was mispronounced only slightly, yet it was enough no serpent was actually conjured. Lutain instead unraveled from Draco's arm and sprang out from under his sleeve; only if you had been looking closely would anyone notice the difference.

Lutain landed heavily on the floor and reared his head with a loud hiss.

Nearby students screamed and stumbled back, Snape looked surprised but also positively gleeful with the turnout.

"I'll get rid of it!" Lockhart shouted, waltzing past the horrified Skylar. He pointed his wand, and with a loud bang Lutain flew through the air before landing in exactly the same spot with a smack. Adrian would have been concerned if it was anyone *except* Lockhart casting the spell.

"*You purple coated bird!*" Lutain hissed angrily, turning and locking eyes with a terrified Gryffindor second year. "*I'd love to bite the lark with my venom!*"

The tanned boy whimpered loudly.

"Leave him alone!" Skylar shouted, looking terrified for his year mate.

Lutain performed perfectly, and once again Adrian was relieved he had taught his companion English.

Lutain slunk to the ground and instantly went docile. He was the threat level of a limp garden hose and staring at Skylar blankly.

The Gryffindor second year, if anything, went even paler.

Whispers spread quickly, accusing and skeptic eyes were turned to Skylar who was looking rather horrified himself.

"No- no I-" Skylar stumbled a bit, at a loss for words. "I don't talk to snakes-"

Lutain deserved a prized hamster; he *nodded* his scaly head.

If this was what people thought Parseltongue was, Adrian was almost disappointed.

Skylar stumbled backwards and the crowd around him took another step back. Even Ron was looking a bit pale.

"*Do I get a rat?*" Lutain hissed lowly, rising high enough to retain in eye contact with Skylar even having slid off the stage.

"No! I didn't do anything!" Skylar shouted desperately, pointing his wand at Lutain who had (bless his best friend), started to slowly slither after him.

"Stay back!" Skylar howled, looking on the verge of tears. Lutain stopped dead in his tracks and once again nodded obviously. A Hufflepuff nearest Adrian whimpered quietly.

Adrian would get Lutain the best rat he could find.

Skylar ran and the crowd collapsed into a maddening mixture of rushing feet and louder shouts. Words like "Parseltongue!" and "Heir!" were thrown around, already the rumor catching purchase.

Lutain moved and slid off the stage as fast as he could slither, Adrian lifted the edge of his cloak and his familiar quickly circled his calf inching upwards out of sight.

The students were all dismissed, nobody would be able to focus with Skylar having run out so quickly.

Adrian caught up with Draco and with a smile gave a short nod.

"Everyone thinks Potter is the Heir now." Draco seemed dazed. "that snake knows English?"

"Lutain is very smart," Adrian agreed, "and he's fine."

"Give him a rat or whatever he eats for me."

Adrian certainly would.

Adrian went looking for the Hogwarts gamekeeper, the giant man Hagrid.

Lutain deserved the best rat he could get and Hagrid seemed his best bet to get something that his familiar would absolutely love. The snow had come in, a wicked blizzard in the night which canceled all of the Herbology and Care classes outside. Likely Hagrid would be outside, trying to tend to the snow.

He found Hagrid, walking into the castle with a thick wooly balaclava and a moleskin coat. He was carrying a mangled mess of feathers in one arm.

"Hagrid?" Adrian asked, seeing the large man jump and stare at Adrian for a perplexing amount of time. "I talked with you before school started. You said you may know where to get some decent rats?"

"Ya!" Hagrid nodded, blinking out of whatever dazed state he was in. "Yer right! I got a few down in mah hut." Hagrid blinked a drop of melted snow out of his eye. The man was twitchy, curled in ever so slightly on himself with the strangest expression of nostalgia.

"What do you have there?" Adrian asked, trying to see the mangled mess. "What bird is that?"

"A rooster, second one killed this term," Hagrid explained, grimacing. "It's either foxes or somethin', an' I need the Headmaster's permission ter put a charm around the hen coop."

"Good luck with that," Adrian said. He smiled thinly. "Could you send me a few mice by owl?"

Hagrid was looking at Adrian's face a moment too long for comfort, almost bewitched by Adrian's thin lipped smile. Hurriedly the man nodded, as if realizing how rude he was being by staring. Hagrid mumbled something hurriedly, along the lines that he *really* did need to talk to the headmaster.

Adrian hummed to himself and walked up the steps towards the corridor which would take him to the library. A rooster? Surely it had to be a clue; almost nothing ever attacked something that the gamekeeper was protecting.

"Attack!" He heard a loud shriek although it was quite a distance away. "Attack! Another attack!"

Adrian turned and started running towards the noise. "No mortal or ghost is safe! Run for your lives!"

Door after door flew open along the corridor as people filed out to see the sight. It was even better than Adrian could have imagined.

There was a petrified body of the same Gryffindor second year who Lutain had targeted at the dueling club and a *ghost*.

The ghost was stuck in a silent scream, body position stiff and rigid.

Professor McGonagall came running, followed by her own class. She pointed her wand and sent a loud bang into the air, which restored silence, and ordered everyone back into their classes.

"Caught in the act!" Shouted a Hufflepuff loudly. Adrian recognised the boy as someone he'd gotten into a fight with before, Ernie. Ernie pointed his finger at Skylar, who floundered for something to say.

Adrian caught Skylar's eye, and saw the utter terror and confusion in his eyes.

His plan was working *perfectly.*

The double attack on Dean (as he learned his name after) and the Gryffindor ghost, Nearly Headless Nick, turned what had hitherto been nervousness into real panic. Amazingly, it was Nearly Headless Nick's fate which concerned so many people. What *monster* could possibly do that sort of thing to a *ghost*?

There was almost a stampede to book seats on the Hogwarts Express so that students could go home for Christmas.

Adrian had chose to stay at Hogwarts over the holidays; as much as he would like to see Bellatrix, he was in no state prepared to see his father once again. Just the thought brought back the anxious trembling in his hands.

Draco chose to stay at the castle as well, Crabbe and Goyle followed suit.

Christmas came around and Adrian received gifts from a surprising number of people.

Hermione had gifted him a luxurious eagle-feather quill. Hagrid sent a box with three well groomed mice, which had Lutain hissing with gleeful anticipation. Draco gifted him a box of treacle tarts, likely bought from the store Honeydukes.

Bellatrix sent him a bag full of galleons, which actually was very kind considering he owl ordered a large quantity of things now. Rabastan sent, once again, a collection of potions. These ones were more complex and quite a few were made for secret messages or truth serums. Rodolphus sent an ironic fountain pen, shaped with a snake curving around the grip. Adrian didn't recognize the species.

The Great Hall was beautiful, not only were there a dozen frost coated Christmas trees and thick garlands of holly and mistletoe, but enchanted snow was falling from the sky above.

Draco Malfoy made several loud, snide remarks about the crude looking sweater Skylar was wearing. Hermione ushered the remaining two of the golden trio out of the Hall, which was suspicious but Adrian was too amused with Draco feeding Lutain various bits of pudding and tarts.

Adrian slipped into the library once more, as he had been since the roosters were added into his search. He took out a book, *finally* on the shelves from the lack of students over Christmas break, and went back to the Slytherin Common room.

The room was empty which wasn't much of a surprise. It meant that Adrian had a selection of any of the couches to read the book on.

The stone entrance slid open and Draco walked in with Crabbe and Goyle lumbering behind him. As well as-

"Bullstrode?" Adrian asked, lifting one eyebrow curiously. "I thought you went home for the holidays."

Millicent stumbled, looking rather odd before she jutted out her chin, "I came back."

Adrian blinked, and looked back at his book. She must have still been upset at him.

"Wait here," Malfoy said to Crabbe and Goyle who both took seats on nearby couches. "I'll go and get it, my father's just sent it to me-"

Draco walked off to his room, and then returned with a newspaper clipping. He thrust it under Crabbe's nose, causing the boy to go cross-eyed. Draco grinned. "That'll give you a laugh."

"*Master?*" Adrian peered over his book over towards the steps to the downstairs level where the rooms were. With the majority of Slytherins gone, Adrian felt it was alright to leave the door open for Lutain to freely wander the common room.

Draco and the others chattered on about something Adrian didn't care about. Lutain slid over and scented the air. The sight of Lutain sliding up onto the table between the couches caused all three to pale.

"There it is," Draco cut in, shifting topics to point at Lutain. "I was going to see if it liked stewed carrots."

"Considering Lutain hates vegetables, I doubt it," Adrian noted, giving a long stretch before closing his book and facing the group. "What were we talking about?"

"The Heir of Slytherin," Draco caught Adrian up. Malfoy jutted his chin out, maybe in an attempt to pout. "I wish I knew who it was. I could help them."

Crabbe's jaw dropped so he looked even more clueless.

"You must have some idea who's behind it all…" Millicent trailed off, her voice wavering strangely.

"You know I haven't, how many times have we had this discussion?" Draco scowled. Draco turned and glanced directly at Adrian. "If *anyone* knows it's *you*."

All eyes were on him. "Well, the school seems set that it's Skylar Potter."

Draco let out a massive snort.

"And Father won't tell me anything about the last time the Chamber was opened either. Of course, it was fifty years ago, so it was before his time, but he knows all about it and he says that it was all kept quiet and it'll look suspicious if I know too much about it. But I know one thing- last time the Chamber of Secrets was opened, a Mudblood *died*. So I bet it's a matter of time before one of them's killed this time...I hope it's Granger." He said with relish.

Adrian sighed loudly, "Honestly, Draco. You just don't like her because she's actual competition."

"I don't like her because you dragged her *here*," Draco snapped. "You and your bloody deals and now you're dragging in Mudbloods?"

"I'm sorry," Adrian said, his tone carefully pitched to indicate he was anything but. He tilted his head towards Draco. "Are you questioning me?"

Draco scowled and crossed his arms. "That's Millicent's job, isn't it?"

Millicent blinked wide eyed and looked overwhelmed.

Something wasn't adding up.

"D'you know if the person who opened the Chamber last time was caught?"

"Oh, yeah...whoever it was was expelled," said Malfoy, "They're probably still in Azkaban."

"Azkaban?" Goyle said, looking puzzled.

"Azkaban- the wizard prison, Goyle." Malfoy looked at him in disbelief. "Honestly, if you were any slower, you'd be going backward."

"How did the chamber get opened?" Millicent butted in. "If only the Heir can open it, how would someone be able to if they're in Azkaban?"

Draco waved his hand at Adrian, beckoning him to take a turn to talk.

Adrian shrugged half heartedly, trailing his hand down Lutain's back. "I don't know. There isn't any information- *I* didn't know about the death." Adrian nodded to a smug looking Malfoy. "Maybe it required specific magic, or a specific ability."

Goyle's eyes widened and he nudged Crabbe who also seemed to have realized something.

"Lutain," Adrian spoke low, causing his familiar to glance at him. "Do you have a *rat* to sniff out?"

Lutain's tongue flickered in the air wildly, *"Master, there is something- no. No rat. Master."*

Adrian relaxed and looked at Millicent. She seemed rather uncomfortable still, yet it was undeniably her.

"Malfoy," Adrian snapped out, nearly smacking himself for not thinking of it sooner, "Do you know what Boomslang skin is used for?"

Draco seemed surprised but blinked. "Brewing potions now, Selwyn?"

"I buy them," Adrian deadpanned, "but amuse me."

"We've got to go," Millicent stood. There was something off about how she sniffed, something about the tilt of her head. "I heard that Potter git was in the library."

"Give him a hex for me," Draco waved them off, before returning in thought.

The three of them left, and Draco started to list off potions, "Grolji's Elixer, Polyjuice Potion, Madora-"

Adrian suddenly felt a bit dizzy. He gave Malfoy a sharp look. "Polyjuice Potion? That changes your shape, doesn't it?"

"For an hour," Draco confirmed, not quite understanding, "Why?"

Millicent had been acting odd, Goyle more obvious than normal, Crabbe unusually silent-

Adrian glanced at the exit door. All three of them had vanished without a trace.

He cursed so crudely Draco blushed.

Chamber

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian is angry with people, fights a book, and faces a crossroad.

Chapter Notes

And here we are, the start of everything going sour.
I hope that this double length chapter is everything you all hoped for.

Fan art is linked at the end of this chapter to my tumblr

Adrian adopted a vengeful wrath once the rest of the students returned.

Millicent, the *real* Millicent, confirmed she hadn't ever set foot in the dungeons during the break. This sent Draco into a fit as well.

With both Adrian and Draco prowling in a simmering anger, the Slytherin population consciously tried to avoid them.

Adrian didn't care, his thoughts revolved around the actions of the Golden Trio.

A small part of Adrian *was* impressed- a second year successfully brewed the Polyjuice potion?

But *where* would three students find a secluded location secure enough to brew such a complex potion.

Adrian was venturing back to the spot where Filch's cat had been petrified. He searched for *any clue,* either regarding the Slytherin heir or the trio.

He heard Filch shouting from a corridor down, where a stream of water passed Adrian and descended a slope towards the shouting.

The puddle of water was traveling from under a heavy battered door, not slowing with its torrent.

It was a washroom, marked with a large "Out of Order" sign. Adrian grimaced as water soaked into his robe, yet he did not let it deter him.

He pushed the door open, feeling the resistance of the water that spilled out.

There was a bawling ghost, out of sight although loud enough to be a nuisance. It was dark; the candles normally magically lit were extinguished from the rush of water that had left both walls and floor soaking wet.

"Hello?" Adrian asked, his voice echoing off the walls.

A ghost head popped out of a stall. It was a young girl, her face translucent and blotchy. ‘Who’s that?” it glugged miserably. “Come to throw something else at me?”

She saw Adrian, paused, and seemed to grow even paler. She *screamed,* the sound echoing painfully in Adrian’s ears. Her eyes bulged, arms trembling and shaking water droplets almost comically onto the floor. Her jaw shook as she rattled out horrible choking noises, tears trailing down her face before she leapt into a toilet out of sight.

Adrian blinked, slightly dumbstruck by the violent reaction.

The room was eerily silent, the dripping faucets echoing rhythmically.

There was a small thin book under a nearby sink. It was black and waterlogged, standing out in the bleak room.

Adrian picked it up, wrinkling his nose at the uncomfortable texture of wet parchment. He opened the book, there was no ink inside the pages. It completely unused.

It was a diary, and the date on the inner cover said it was fifty years old. Why would someone not use a diary, or why would they keep it around just to throw it away in a girls room?

Adrian hummed quizzically, searching along the spine and the back cover for the traces of a name. It was possible whoever it was would want it returned at a later time. He spotted something, almost carved with fine handwriting just inside-

T. M. Riddle.

Adrian dropped the book. It splashed back into the sink carelessly.

“No way,” he breathed, feeling distant as he opened the book again. *How* was it possible...

Then he was hit with something strong and dizzying, enough to nearly send him toppling to the flooded floor. It was overwhelming, the spasming sensation of pain prickling along each of his nerves. Nausea rose until the vague sensation of *sick* wasn’t limited only to his organs.

Adrian curled in on himself, almost heaving as his head felt thick and sluggish- as if he had inhaled too much of Lockhart’s perfume.

It *whispered,* something whispered words he could *almost* understand. A language he didn’t understand, something muffled but loud enough he could hear the cadence of speech.

The hand clutching the diary had gone numb from biting cold.

It relented, lifting immense weight from Adrian’s chest and suddenly he could breathe again.

He swallowed and placed the book in his front pocket. His cloak hung slightly further on the one side to accommodate the weight.. It pulsed something foreign, low and alluring like the first curse he had ever cast.

Considering that if this...*thing,* did belong to T. M. Riddle, Adrian wasn’t exactly sure what sort of effects it would have. It was possible it could seriously harm him.

But the coincidence of finding something from T. M. Riddle *during* the opening of the Chamber of Secrets- it had to be linked. Which led him to to the only impulsive thing he could think of doing.

He needed to write in this as soon as possible.

The attacks had mysteriously vanished, which given the recent discovery, made *sense.*

The diary- the *diary* belonged to his father, who *was* the Heir of Slytherin! Somehow this *book* was the one opening the chamber and setting the monster loose.

Although he hadn't actually written in it yet, Adrian was too paranoid to leave it sitting out. He kept it on his body at all time, trapped within the anxiety ridden thoughts that *somehow,* someone would know that it was him.

The only thing to rattle him out of his sleepless thoughts was, somehow, Lockhart had gotten it in his head that *he* was the reason the attacks had stopped.

Lockhart's idea of a morale-booster became clear at breakfast on February fourteenth.

The walls were coated with disgustingly pink flowers. Worse still, heart-shaped confetti rained slowly from the pale blue ceiling.

Only Lockhart seemed to be enjoying himself, with the lurid pink robes to match the decorations.

The rest of the day, dwarves were hired to carry around singing valentines day cards.

The cards were rubbish at best. The highlight was the foul one, christened with glitter and red hearts sent from Lockhart to Snape during a house meeting.

Adrian had avoided the dwarves so far, mostly due to his infamous dealings. Daphne had received three, taking them all in grace.

Draco was dreading the event, knowing positively he would have at least one. The pale haired boy glued himself to Adrian's side, certain that Adrian would have a way to avoid the blasted creatures.

Adrian couldn't. Even running didn't deter one persistent dwarf which managed to chase them across an entire open courtyard. If it wasn't for the spell resistant skin, Adrian would have sent dozens of tripping spells hoping one would hit.

"Go get 'em!" One Gryffindor shouted, whooping loudly at the dwarf when he saw the target.

There was no way dwarves should be able to run up stairs that fast; they were so short the legs shouldn't be able to move that quickly.

"Is it after me, or you?" Adrian panted, although not looking as exhausted as Draco.

Draco was flushed, skin reddening and contrasting with his light hair.

"Doesn't matter," Draco panted, eyes sharpening with a look of Slytherin cunning, "It's getting you."

Adrian took a moment to puzzle over Draco's words, not understanding foreboding tone.

Draco turned, and smacked Adrian lightly across his chest. Considering how fast they were sprinting up the steps, the even slight push was enough to topple Adrian to the ground.

He grunted, hitting the ground and catching a glimpse of Draco managing to escape.

“Draco!” He shouted, half angry although half amused by the absurdity of the situation.

They were being chased by a *dwarf* wearing a *diaper.*

It wasn’t nearly as funny once the Dwarf shouted loudly in victory and nearly *tackled* Adrian against the ground.

“Finally!” The dwarf grunted, shuffling in its side back for a slip of folded parchment. It cleared its throat, and Adrian knocked his head against the stone steps again.

“He’s the kid that boy Selwyn,

Who’ll sell you treats or pigskin,

And find you stuff right out of books,

He’ll save your skin with his looks!”

Adrian blinked, the poem was almost as absurd as the situation.

Someone burst into cackling laughter, Draco had peered out from the top of the staircase, having heard the valentine.

“We don’t talk about this,” Adrian grumbled, trying to dislodge the dwarf from where it sat on his chest.

“As if!” Draco cackled, “Oh Adrian! Will you fetch me pigskin?”

“Oi!” The dwarf looked at Draco speculatively, “I got one for you too!”

Draco paled, and turned to run.

“‘We don’t talk about this’ my arse!” Adrian shouted, finally able to catch his breath when the dwarf jumped off his chest in hot pursuit once again.

Thankfully, it was the last valentine he received that day.

Draco wasn’t as lucky.

‘Hello’ Adrian wrote with the Eagle-feather quill Hermione gave him, *‘I know who you are.’*

Adrian wasn’t sure if it would even work. It was a considerable risk, also considering that he didn’t know if it would trigger the dark magic or curse. He had his tattoo ready to send a warning and explain what he had done in the case of an unspeakable curse.

The ink was absorbed instantly into the diary; in seconds fine spidery handwriting wrote itself across the pages, *‘Hello, I’m sorry I believe we haven’t met. My name is Tom Riddle, who are you?’*

Adrian chewed his bottom lip, he didn’t feel anything different. Perhaps there was no curse, or maybe he had to interact with it longer.

The handwriting was the exact same, all doubt he had for its true creator vanished.

Should he answer realistically?

"Lutain?" Adrian hissed, peering around his room. Almost on cue his familiar slid out of his charmed box, flickering his tongue quizzically.

"Yes, Master?" Lutain looked at the book in puzzlement, not seeing why Adrian was speaking so cautiously.

"This book, it's possibly very cursed." Adrian paused, *"If something happens, I need you to push the book or hide it, and get help for me."*

Lutain tensed, *"Is it smart to work with curses?"*

"Probably not, but it's my father's." Adrian swallowed, *"And it involves the Chamber. Just...watch the door, you remember how to turn the handle? Alright, wish me luck."*

Adrian ignored how his snake watched cautiously. He dipped his quill in ink and scratched out the letters painfully slow.

'Adrian Selwyn.' He wrote, watching the words vanish into the pages themselves.

'Hello then, Adrian.' It replied almost instantly, seeming so friendly, *'It's a pleasure to meet you.'*

Adrian paused, and sighed. What was he hoping for? There was no way that this diary and his father would trust him so readily.

'I know you opened the Chamber,' Adrian wrote carefully, *'Where is it?'*

The words sunk in, and he didn't get a response until nearly two minutes later. The words were written considerably slowly, although not with hesitation of pondering words.

'I'm sorry, I just caught the Heir, I don't know. But I hear your school is suffering what mine did as well, fifty years ago. Shall I show you?'

Adrian scratched two letters, *'No.'*

He could tell he was confusing the book, although it was doing a marvelous job at hiding it.

'Alright,' It almost seemed to test the water, *'It sounds wonderful that the situation is under control once more.'*

Adrian snorted against his better judgement, a smile curling at his mouth. Was this what it would be like to actually have a conversation with his father?

'My name is Hadrianus Selwyn,' Adrian wrote carefully, *'I have a familiar, his name is Lutain. Only two people can speak to him,'*

'That's very interesting, as well as your name. You are very lucky to have a familiar while also in Hogwarts. I hear it is very difficult to obtain one.'

Adrian wasn't entirely sure the book hadn't been charmed with a monitor spell. Anything he wrote could be rewritten someplace else; he had to be subtle.

'You could talk to him as well,' Adrian wrote, hoping that the book was picking up the now not so subtle clues. *'He was a pain to speak to at first.'*

‘I’m sorry, I don’t know what you’re talking about. I wasn’t aware of a creature which could speak English fluently.’

Adrian growled annoyed.

‘I thought you’d be smarter for the Heir of Slytherin,’ Adrian scribbled out frustrated.

‘I’m sorry, I only caught the Heir.’

The book was being evasive because he didn’t trust him, which was understandable given that it was talking to a stranger.

“It doesn’t trust me,” Adrian hissed to Lutain, who was still peering at the book questionably. Adrian hadn’t ever taught Lutain how to read English.

“Nagini?” Lutain offered, *“Only something Nagini knows?”*

“Like what?” Adrian sighed, *“I don’t know what much about my father to begin with.”*

This book would start getting sassy if he didn’t start responding fast.

‘You’re being very uncooperative.’ Adrian huffed, flinching as the book suddenly dropped in temperature. It was seeping cold, tingling up the nerves, It *stung,* creeping like a numbing tar in his blood.

‘Stop that,’ Adrian scratched out, hand shaking slightly.

At once, it receded and paused.

‘Stop what?’ It asked innocently, the strange sensation tickling the back of his head.

‘Reaching up,’ Adrian wrote awkwardly, *‘Going up my arms.’*

‘You can feel that?’

‘Yes.’ Adrian wrote, was he not supposed to?

It flared suddenly, not burning or tingling but moving up his hand once again. Rolling oil invisibly over the surface of his skin.

He felt it touch his barriers, sliding through like legilimency without any mind.

Adrian choked, folding over and clutching his scalp between shaking hands.

“Master?” Lutain hissed in alarm, *“Master?”*

“Possession,” Adrian choked out, feeling as if the invisible presence was clawing in his throat, *“It’s-”*

‘Oh,’ an invisible presence whispered, sliding between each wall of his mind like water, *‘oh,’*

Then it receded, withdrawing so fast it left Adrian slamming backwards heaving against the back of his headboard.

“Back!” Lutain hissed, rearing in a lethal display as he revealed his long fangs, glaring in Adrian’s face with the viciousness of a wild animal, *“Leave!”*

“It’s me,” Adrian blinked, wincing as he fumbled for a vial of pain relief potion he received for Christmas.

He almost kicked his foot out to send the book flying across the room. An artifact with sentience strong enough to *possess* someone? What was his father *thinking?* At least he knew the book wasn’t spelled to compromise him.

A single word scribbled back across the page, shaky in contrast to its normally precise lines.

‘How?’

So *now* it believed him. It was alarming and a bit terrifying how quickly it demolished his Occlumency shields, he was proud of them.

‘I’m your son,’ Adrian wrote, his handwriting shaky for what was happening, *‘Voldemort is injured. The Chamber of Secrets has been opened and I can't find the entrance.’*

‘Impossible,’ It wrote instantly, *‘Voldemort cannot be harmed.’*

So his father had a god complex as well.

‘He is,’ Adrian tapped the edge of the quill against his lip, *‘He looks like a mandrake.’*

‘What.’ It deadpanned. Adrian paused with his quill still on the page, ink seeped into a larger blot the longer he waited, *‘A mandrake. A screaming shriveled root.’*

Adrian slid the book out of his reach and onto the edge of his bed. Its pages flickered quickly, moving from cover to cover like a whirlwind. It snapped shut, spine creaking loudly.

“What is it doing?” Lutain asked curiously, he hadn’t ever seen a book act like that before, *“Is it angry for being read?”*

“No, he doesn’t like how my father looks like a plant.” Adrian responded calmly, waiting for the diary to end its temper tantrum, *“Apparently it’s a sensitive subject.”*

The book swung open to an empty page, quickly spreading black ink across its page.

‘A lavatory. Speak in the tongue under the sinks. A girl was killed there.’

Adrian’s eyes widened- the ghost he had been talking to earlier? The one that screamed at him?

Of *course,* she would scream because he was similar in appearance to her killer.

‘What is the monster?’ Adrian wrote back calmly.

A single word filled the page.

‘Basilisk.’

Adrian was forced as the days continued, to pick his classes for the next year. Some people chose classes that were sure to be very simple to learn, Divination mostly. Adrian felt compelled to take Care for Magical Creatures, something about the course seeming highly interesting to him although he would likely be caring for slugs.

Ancient Runes also seemed important, as well as Arithmancy

In the end, he chose to take Ancient Runes and Care, leaving his schedule free to fill with his other required core classes.

Now that Adrian had talked to Tom Riddle over the more darker materials, he often took the diary with him to have conversations about everything he could whenever he could.

He found out, that his father was actually an amazing teacher.

With Tom Riddle's written instruction, Adrian actually had confidence in his Occlumency. It was almost like holding the diary and focusing on his shields, somehow gave him a boost- like the diary itself was assisting him with making them stronger. It was entirely plausible considering the book had the suspicious capability for possession.

Then he ran into Hermione.

He scowled, glaring at her cold enough for the girl to freeze. Hermione managed to look guilty, and walked over before tugging on Adrian's arm to pull him *away* from his chair and his books.

She dragged him around a bookshelf where they were a bit more secluded.

"Adrian, I'm really sorry-" She started, voice jumbling and jumping to explain, "You probably know that we had the Polyjuice potion... but we just wanted to ask Malfoy!"

"You used a deal *against* me." He growled out angrily, "You snuck into my dorm to *spy* on me!"

Hermione chewed her lip uncertainly, and nodded.

"I have nothing left to say to you." Adrian bit out, and Hermione grabbed his arm once more.

"I need your help!" She blurted, looking embarrassed, "I- I know you know a lot about magical creatures and I can't find the right book so I was actually looking for you and..."

"Hermione!" Adrian hissed out, nearing the end of his patience.

"Basilisk!" She blurted, seeming unsettled but looking at him hopefully, "I think the monster is a basilisk!"

"Impossible." Adrian ground out, "Basilisk's can't survive in this climate. Not to mention that if it was, *Potter* would have heard it-"

"He's not a Parseltongue!" She exclaimed angrily.

"And the monster isn't a basilisk!" Adrian hissed back, "Why don't you busy yourself with course selections, or go read something *useful."*

He turned and dismissed her, not feeling a shred of guilt when she looked very much like she was about to cry.

He returned to his spot, pausing and noticing at once something was askew.

He sorted through his books, mouthing the titles as he went.

It took him until he had placed them all back in his bag that he realized the diary was gone.

The next week, he heard the Basilisk travel through the pipes again.

He had rushed to the washroom in question, peering at all of the sinks but he hadn't found any symbol for a snake. He still hadn't managed to get to the chamber.

It was Hermione who was found petrified.

With how annoying she had been getting, a part of Adrian wished the basilisk had killed her.

With the recent attacks, the failure to find a culprit, and lack of knowledge of what the monster actually *was;* Dumbledore was suspended from Hogwarts by Minister's Orders.

People were more frantic, the hospital wing was entirely shut down and permitted no guests. Classes were covered with the strictest security, and students moved in large groups.

The Exams were to start on the first of June, one week from today.

It was asinine that they were *still* getting exams- classes were canceled left and right in fear of the attacks. The library was closed from being a crime scene, and each house had a strict curfew.

Three days before the first exam, Professor McGonagall made an important announcement. The Mandrakes had finally grown to a point where the cuttings could be used to revive those who had been petrified.

The time was drawing short, the window of opportunity for the diary to act was down to just days.

Adrian smiled when he heard the announcement for all students to go back to their House Dormitories. That meant there was another petrification, which meant the diary had decided to take actions.

Draco stared at him horrified as he made his way the opposite direction of the Dorm.

"Adrian! Where are you going!" Draco hissed, and Adrian simply smiled. A breathless excited smile which left Draco standing stunned. Something wasn't right about his eyes.

Adrian walked away, thankful that Lutain had fallen asleep in his pocket.

"Wake up." Adrian giggled, sliding behind a tapestry and pulling out his wand, "It's time to go to the chamber Lutain," He practically crooned.

He casted the disillusionment charm on him, feeling the unsettling sensation as he walked through the now empty hallways with ease.

"What?" Lutain stumbled, waking up sleepily, *"What time is it?"*

"Time for the Chamber," Adrian hissed, knowing that there was no risk while invisible, *"Let's head to the Chamber and see the basilisk."*

They walked to the washroom, there was a message written in blood right where the first message had been written at the start of the year.

“Her skeleton will lie in the Chamber forever.” He read quietly in English, lifting a fist to bite it sharply. He would have laughed otherwise- out of sheer relief. Everything was working, the diary *had* taken a body.

He didn’t bother with investigating the sinks, *“Open!”* He hissed loudly.

The sinks ground, and slowly slid open to the beautiful sight of a hole in the ground.

Adrian stepped into the hole and slid out of sight.

“Look at the shed!” Lutain gasped, flickering his tongue at the huge hollowed form of the shed skin. It was twenty feet long and pale white with imprints of scales larger than Adrian’s fist.

There was something freeing about being in this chamber- miles underground. There had never been documents saying that the Chamber existed. No wards, spells, or maps ever drew it. It was completely untraceable, unmappable, which meant no matter what sort of spells Adrian casted, he would *never* be found.

His face was starting to hurt from smiling when he reached the next set of doors, two carved intertwining serpents with glittering green eyes.

“Open,” Adrian laughed, watching as the door cracked apart and each half slid out of sight.

Adrian walked forward, nearly skipping.

He and Lutain were standing at the end of a very long, dimly lit chamber. Towering stone pillars were decorated with more curved serpents, rose high into the dark to support the ceiling.

Adrian pulled out his wand and walked between the serpentine columns, his footsteps echoed loudly off the shadowy halls.

At the last of the pillars, a statue high as the Chamber itself loomed into view, standing against the back wall. Adrian had to crane his neck back to see the face above: something monkey in features with a long thin beard.

At the base of the floor, a single prone red haired girl lay.

“Ginny Weasley?” Adrian asked, his voice echoing loudly, “Seems a bit strange to possess a pure-blood.”

“It worked, didn’t it?” a soft voice answered him behind.

Adrian turned slowly, holding his wand aloft.

The tall black haired boy was unmistakable, although he was eying over Adrian with interest, “You have my face,” Tom said, blinking in surprise and some sort of pride, “And my hair.”

“Blood adoption,” Adrian explained, trying to not seem strange with how intently he was looking at Tom Riddle. He hadn’t ever seen his father look remotely humanoid, seeing him like this was baffling and thrilling. Adrian wondered how similar they really would look once he grew more.

Ginny made a loud whimper, echoing through the hall.

Adrian looked down at the girl, “She isn’t dead?”

“Almost,” Tom sighed, looking at her fondly, “She was a wonderful pawn. As she grows weaker, I grow stronger.”

“Did you possess her the entire time?” Adrian asked intrigued, “Or only at times?”

“At times,” Riddle confirmed, prodding the girl with one of his shoes, “She was pathetically easy.”

“Are you able to go back into the diary?” Adrian asked, “It would be easier to take you out of here.”

Riddle was still eying Adrian with some sort of fond affection. Riddle stepped forward, bending slightly and with one hand touched Adrian’s cheekbone. Then his jawline, he pinched his chin and turned his head side to side to observe it better.

“You *do* look like me.” Riddle hummed, “So strange, I never thought I would ever have…”

He trailed off, and then he smiled. It was a wide breathless smile which somehow made something in Adrian’s heart stir.

“Has my older self taught you spells?” The younger asked excitedly, “I could feel you when you walked in here- why is that?”

“You can feel me?” Adrian’s jaw dropped, “How?”

Riddle shrugged and offered a sharklike grin, “Would you like to see Adalonda?”

“The basilisk?” Adrian asked excitedly, looking around the chamber.

Riddle turned, looked up at the statue and hissed loudly, *“Speak to me Salazar Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four.”*

The stone mouth slid open, and from the empty cavern something slithered from within.

“Adalonda,” Riddle spoke, *“This is a friend of your noble kind. He speaks and is of my blood.”*

The basilisk hit the ground, its eyes were greyish and clouded by an extra eyelid. It’s girth was amazing, it’s hiss was loud enough to echo.

“Another speaker?” It spoke, voice much more intelligent as the rest of its body landed and began to slither between them, *“So young. So fresh.”* It hissed, jaws opening to reveal a row of multiple fangs in its mouth, pointed and needle sharp like a python or a boa.

Lutain slithered out of his pocket and up to see the basilisk, *“Your scales are like sun on water.”* Lutain prattled out, nearly wriggling in excitement, *“Your teeth could sink many prey.”*

The basilisk hissed, tilting its head curiously, *“A little one,”* It cooed, *“So small, are your fangs sharp?”*

Lutain hissed eagerly and slid off Adrian onto the ground to rear in front of the mighty basilisk. He was a tiny twig in the wake of an ancient Oak tree.

“What is your name, little one?” It tilted its head, *“You are not Nagini.”*

Adrian looked at Riddle who stood with his leg resting on the deathly still Ginny.

“You had Nagini when you were at Hogwarts?”

“She’s still around?” Riddle looked interested, “She had just hatched.”

“Nagini is wise.” Lutain hissed in glee, *“Master! The mark! Summon the mark!”*

Oh, that was actually a good idea.

Riddle blinked in alarm, “I finished the Dark Mark?”

“A different one,” Adrian explained, removing his cloak and unbuttoning his shirt. He pressed his fingers to his collarbone and hissed directly at his skin *“Nagini.”*

He grimaced at the sensation and Nagini pulled her way out of his skin. Riddle’s eyes widened and he smiled at the sight of his familiar moving around Adrian’s body, *“Nagini,”* Adrian addressed the mark, *“Tell father that the diary has taken a body.”*

The snake hissed and dove through his skin again.

“That’s brilliant,” Riddle smiled, glancing down at Ginny, “I think she’s comatose.”

Adrian nodded, staring at the Weasley girl.

Her breathing was low, barely anything. Her eyes had opened at some point and were rolling around in her skull, clouded and desperate. She made desperate whimpering noises, tears ran from the corner of her eyes.

“She’s going to die,” Adrian breathed, lowering to his knees. The sound of his kneecaps hitting the stone was muffled yet sounded loudly in Adrian’s ears.

He felt Riddle behind him, peering over interestedly. His presence washed soothing black waves over Adrian’s mind; he felt it go cloudy, everything tinted by the inhales and slowing exhales.

“She doesn’t have to,” Riddle spoke, there was a soft tone in his voice, one hand resting on Adrian’s shoulder, “You could take her with you if you want. She’d live.”

He *could,* he could take her with him. Be declared a hero and carry Ginevra Weasley to safety from the Chamber of Secrets...

But how would he explain how he knew she was down here? How would he explain how he snuck down here? How would he explain how he saved her from the basilisk?

Then what would the story be for how Ginny had been opening the chamber?

“No, no I can't.” Adrian breathed, the soothing dark around his shoulders was fogging his mind, “She can’t live.”

Adrian almost heard the phantom whispers of something inaudible hiss *‘yessss’* deep in his skull.

“Are you sure?” Riddle sounded so concerned, “I can pull away now, not become tangible.”

“You can’t.” Adrian breathed, “You can’t kill her entirely. I have to sneak you out in the diary.”

Riddle exhaled with a smile somewhere between resignation and pride, and with the sound of a taught wire snapping, Ginny let out a choked gasp and a cry. Tears began cascading as she started sobbing wildly.

“Master?” Lutain asked, slithering over and looking at Adrian concernedly.

Adrian didn’t hear him- whispers were gathering in his head.

“You should let her live,” Riddle whispered, his mouth by his ear.

Something was thrumming *‘Kill her, kill her.’*

“Let her live,” He murmured once again,”She’s in pain.”

‘Kill her Adrian,’ Riddle’s voice was clouding his ability to breathe, like smoke in his lungs, *‘She can’t live.’*

Adrian jerked forward and grabbed the diary from the ground.

Ginny turned her head towards him, her eyes met him and he could see her begging. Tears ran from her eyes.

“Lutain, we’re going.” Adrian spoke, feeling like he was watching the scene from outside his body, *“Adalonda, I must go. Go to sleep, I’ll be back when I can. It may be months.”*

Adalonda gave a regal nod, and turned towards a tunnel on the side.

“She’ll wake up, now that I’m not attached to her,” Riddle warned, looking at the scene with some sort of half lidded amusement- like everything was coming to fruition.

‘Leave her be,’ Something whispered, its voice enticing. He almost didn’t feel his own lips moving, “Leave her in the Chamber.”

“In the Chamber?” Riddle looked almost alarmed, reaching around in some sort of mock embrace, his touch felt like smoke, “In the Chamber? All alone?”

He was breathing in the clouding poison...

“Let her starve to death.” Adrian exhaled almost dazed.

He turned and stumbled out of the Chamber, Adalonda’s scales slid smoothly over the stone until she too, vanished.

Somewhere faintly over the sounds of Tom Riddle laughing in his head, he heard Ginny sobbing.

Fanart of the Chamber Scene

Veil

Chapter Summary

> Where Adrian isn't quite himself, a diary is more than a book, and Bellatrix has a mission

Chapter Notes

> This chapter has not been beta'd.
> This marks the end of the second year.
>
> The end of the previous chapter has been edited to give you a link to fan art relating to the Chamber scene.

Draco Malfoy noticed how Adrian was acting the moment he slipped in.

Draco stayed awake long since the others had retired. He noticed full well that Adrian hadn't been in the Slytherin Dormitories. It was far past curfew.

He noticed instantly the second the stone doorway shifted and a lone figure walked inside.

"Adrian?" Draco asked, rising to his feet. The figure was swaying, sluggish and barely remaining upright.

"Adrian?" Draco asked again, squinting in the dark, "Are you drunk?"

It *was* Adrian, he had one forearm braced against the wall to keep himself upright. Adrian jerked his head upwards- his pupils absolutely blown and his expression something Draco had only ever seen on his aunt Bellatrix in photos from Azkaban.

"Adrian?" Draco took a step back, mindful of the nearby table.

Adrian succumbed to giggles, blinking quickly before tilting his head, expression shifting to something confused before back to hysterical, "Abraxas?"

"What?" Draco blinked, feeling for his wand and holding it tightly, "Where have you *been?"*

Adrian's expression shifted, changing entirely into a *too* pleasant face, a *too* calm composure.

Something wasn't connecting right- like the expression behind Adrian's thoughts were bubbling out into something opposite.

"I'm sorry, Draco, is it?" Adrian spoke formally, blinking dazed and puzzled by the surroundings. He shook his head suddenly, whipping his neck around with the ferocity of his movements.

"Of course, my apologies. I dearly hope I haven't left you waiting too long." Adrian apologized,

face shifting and looking so heartfelt *sincere...*

Draco stared. Absentmindedly his hand subtly drifted to where his wand was tucked securely.

"I'll be heading to bed," Adrian announced, giving a tight lipped smile, "Plenty of packing to do, considering we're leaving soon."

Adrian walked past with grace, pausing at the stairwell as if confused before he jolted forwards as if he had never hesitated.

Draco floundered, and shivered.

He had a feeling he didn't want to know.

Dumbledore returned the next day, apparently the other eleven governors contacted him. In wake of the death of Arthur Weasley's daughter, the anonymous conclusion was that such tragedy occurred due to his absence.

Dumbledore, in the mind of the Ministry, was the best person to try and restore order.

There were no attacks since that day. The hallways were filled with an invisible smog, mourning that encapsulated everything and everyone. The windows did not shine brightly, instead they glowed a dull grey, adding to the atmosphere.

The school once more took extra efforts to try and locate the Chamber of Secrets.

They came no closer to discovery, or closure.

Adrian tried not to think about it.

(Her face was so pale and scared all alone)

Adrian imagined the smile that Tom Riddle, that his *father* gave him. He forced his mind to summon the memory, already distorting and warping in his mind.

He remembered the excitement, the concern and the unusual pride that his real father had not shown him.

He obsessed over the fantasy of his father- his *real* father treating him in the same way.

He wanted to get a similar smile- he *wanted* his father to teach him spells with the eagerness Tom Riddle asked him questions.

There was a part of him nestled deep and scorned inside of him crying for affection. There was a larger part of his bare being that ached for some sort of acknowledgement or recognition from his father.

He knew the diary would be the key to it as well.

The Mandrakes worked perfectly, everyone who had been petrified awoke in confusion.

It was a celebratory moment, until Hermione and those frozen were informed of the single death. They too then joined the funeral parade, never ceasing and wandering without an end in sight.

The Hogwarts Express was a gloomy thing, although people were excited to travel home. Relieved and hoping for the small shred of safety.

Lutain was moping, bemoaning about how long he would have to wait to talk with Adalonda again.

Adrian was excited for the next year as well, he had a feeling it would be very eventful. Not that he hadn't learned or accomplished a lot this year, in contrast to the year prior it was as if he had an epiphany.

The winter holidays, the persistent fear others expressed, Adalonda-

(Ginny's red hair darkened when wet, and in the poor lighting of the Chamber one could easily mistake it for blood pooling out from her throat.)

Adrian flinched boldly, smacking his head against the chilled glass window and startling Lutain from his musings.

"Master?" Lutain asked quietly, *"Thing's won't be the same anymore, are they?"*

Adrian stroked one finger down Lutain's head, "No, no they won't be."

The diary in his pocket burned.

Bellatrix could tell the moment Adrian walked into the house that something had changed.

Adrian held himself differently; he altered suddenly between hunching and barely mumbling to arching his back proudly and gazing at her with a cold had his wand wrapped with white knuckles and sent off spells before Bellatrix could launch a curse.

Rabastan noticed as well, and informed Rodolphus who hadn't been around enough to notice.

Adrian relished in his newfound freedom in the security of the wards. He practiced spells, spells Bellatrix had never heard before and spells which fumbled awkwardly from Adrian's mouth like he had only read them.

Adrian was growing distant. He was slowly and surely separating himself and relying less on Bellatrix. It hurt her in small pangs, a part of her cried out. She *missed* the sparring, the exhilarating laughter Adrian always gave when he had finally bested her. He missed hearing him chuckle under his breath from something his snake whispered in foreign tongue.

She knew that eventually he would be taken from her, yet she longed for more *time.*

Adrian approached her with cold eyes and curtly ordered her to take him to his father.

And then, she *knew* that time had run out.

Adrian walked through the halls with silent shoes and a fluttering cloak.

His occlumency walls were hardened, strengthened with the steely ability of the diary. It influenced his abilities, it snuck into his mind and made his thoughts shrouded and *protected.*

He opened the large doors, hearing them click behind him; this time he felt no fear.

"Father," Adrian addressed, words sliding from his tongue thick as honey as he approached and

bowed, "I have a gift for you."

He pulled the diary from his pocket, securing it in his hold as he walked forward and placed it gently on the table directly in front of the skeletal creature.

He felt his father's surprise- just as he could always feel from the diary. Something sour and sulfuric that tickled the furthest portion of his mind.

"I hope it to be of service," Adrian spoke again, bowing low and smiling crookedly although it was unseen through his hair.

In his rare confidence and pride over his success, he smugly stated "It told me it would be."

He wasn't cursed, so he left.

Nagini greeted him, the real serpent. She was excited to see him, wanting to know his ventures in the 'Stone-den'. He mentioned Adalonda and suddenly he was pinned under her mighty bulk, demanding to know what she had spoken.

He smiled, and explained the beauty of her eyes and the wisdom of her words.

Bellatrix seemed to be fueled by an unnoticed fire. She constantly searched for Adrian under the guise of teaching him new spells.

She gifted him books, marked with broken quills where specific pages had information of interest.

Adrian was rather overwhelmed, although he understood it on a basic level.

He was older (although only twelve) he was of age where his father was beginning to take a special interest in him. Not only that, but he had heard the bare whispers from Bellatrix and Nagini that his father was planning to undergo an elaborate ritual, using the diary to restore himself to power.

Adrian knew that his father had succeeded when he saw all three of the resident wizards crumple to the ground clutching their forearm in pain.

Bellatrix was *ecstatic,* yet her normal chaotic energy was tainted by a melancholy she tried to veil. Adrian felt impassive- would his father accept him and take him under his wing? Or would Bellatrix continue to be his authority figure and teacher until he was older still?

Regardless of Adrian's own insecurities, the appearance of his father only swarmed the past followers to his feet once more.

Bellatrix hushed him and ordered him to wear his prized cloak, enchanted and charmed to keep his features shrouded from prying eyes. There was nothing to be done about his height, although various magical creatures and magical ailments could excuse such size.

The halls were *filled* with masked bodies and hidden eyes, each filling the large banquet room Adrian had never seen. It was elaborate, tall stained glass windows displayed the fading twilight in hues of deep lavender and scarlet.

His father stood tall, and his features were garish and horrifying.

This was what Bellatrix referred to as powerful? The serpentine *creature* bore a striking resemblance to a cobra, a folded reptilian hood pressed to the sides of his throat and shoulders. His father had lost all semblance of a nose, his face having been warped into the serpentine planes of

scales and slitted nostrils. Around the edges of what should have been cheekbones, pitted grooves eerily similar to Nagini's heat sensing pits surveyed the room.

His eyes were the darkest red Adrian had ever seen, his body exuded dark magic like the finest perfume.

"My followers," He spoke, his voice layered with a high pitched hiss similar to his previous vessel's vocal capabilities, "how *long,* we have waited."

Adrian shifted nervously, sticking embarrassingly close to Bellatrix's robes.

"For the days you have all hid," his father's eyes flashed as his lipless mouth articulated the words smoothly, "*uncertainly* in your estates and in the comfort of your *gold."* he sneered loudly, aura pulsating in rhythm to a heartbeat, "the *loyal,* will be rewarded."

He said nothing for those who hadn't been.

"*Go,* my followers," Voldemort smiled, showing the barest traces of a forked tongue, "Await my instructions further, do not fail me."

The room bowed, Adrian stumbling to follow along with the movement. His father stood, sweeping across the floor and through a door further behind where he had stood upon a platform.

"Come along," Bellatrix murmured under her breath, "We are to speak with our Lord after all have left."

Adrian gave a short nod, reaching to fiddle with the hood on his cloak yet mindful that it not fall. Slowly *so slowly,* the room cleared. Rabastan and Rodolphus left them, throwing a cautious look from under their bone masks, a warning to keep Adrian from being harmed extensively.

Bellatrix of course ignored them as well as any maternal instinct she may have had. Her fingers grasped Adrian shoulder to steer them towards the door standing terrifyingly tall.

The door opened under Bellatrix's hand; Nagini reared in anticipation on the other side.

"Hello Nagini," Bellatrix cooed, "How pretty your scales are."

Nagini flickered her tongue, *"You do not have Lutain?"* Nagini seemed disappointed, *"We were talking of the best rats."*

"I wasn't sure how he would be received, I didn't want any unfortunate accidents." Adrian explained, more relaxed in the presence of the giant snake.

"Master keeps all of noble kind under protection," Nagini dismissed, *"Bring Lutain more. His strike is fast but mine is faster."*

Adrian smiled, *"It is, you can down formidable prey, I hear. Can you actually eat a dog?"*

Nagini's tail tip wriggled excitedly as she flickered her tongue hungrily.

"Is she going to show us where to go?" Bellatrix blinked, having been oblivious to the entire conversation.

"Yes, loud-lady." Nagini sighed, sounding exasperated, *"Yes Master says to show you the way. Come, clumsy loud-lady."*

Adrian almost smiled as Nagini sunk to the ground and propelled herself over the stone with her powerful body.

They moved into a waiting room, a balcony with a short series of stairs ascending towards it. Descending down the very steps, an unfamiliar man with dark hair walked.

"Bellatrix," The man said, his voice smooth and polished with poise and confidence, "I see you have brought the boy."

The man turned partially , revealing a thin nose, sculpted cheeks and dark hair framing deep scarlet eyes with the barest traces of slitted pupils.

Only through staring at mirrors and his own face could Adrian hastily recognize the man.

"Father," Adrian addressed breathily, unable to keep the baffled expression from his face. He hastily lowered his hood, revealing his own features.

His father stared at him, and Adrian hastily stumbled into a bow, not entirely sure what else could be expected of him at the time. Nagini stared unnervingly even as his father walked closer to survey him better.

His father blinked slowly, and looked at Bellatrix who had an eager expression set on her pouting lips.

"Bellatrix, I have an assignment for you." Voldemort explained, reaching into his robe pocket to retrieve a roll of parchment, "A specific ministry worker is pending an act which enables the lawful ability to evict those of creature blood from employment."

Bellatrix took the parchment delicately, holding it with reverence and respect.

"The law would create tension in several of our werewolf packs, as well as the vampire clans," His father sniffed in disdain, an expression of annoyance so positively *human* it baffled Adrian for a moment. "it is imperative the worker disappears as well as all mention of the law in question."

"Yes, my Lord!" She gushed, dropping to the floor to humbly kiss his father's robes, "Anything you ask!"

"You," Voldemort addressed Adrian, "will be residing in the room created for your occupancy."

Adrian had a *room?* When had such a thing been set up for him?

"Once you return, you may retrieve the boy." Voldemort elaborated further, adressing Bellatrix who pawed animalistically at his father's feet "fetch the Lestranges for aid."

"Yes my Lord!" Bellatrix gushed, "We will not fail you!"

Adrian gulped as Bellatrix backed away and apparated suddenly, leaving him alone with the tall handsome man who bore a striking resemblance to Adrian's own face.

Voldemort's eyes narrowed, long pale fingers tapping against the white wand in his grasp.

"Master," Nagini hissed, butting her blunt snout against the unoccupied pale hand, *"Hatchling said I could have a dog."*

Voldemort leisurely stroked her head, scratching just under the ridge of her jaw, *"did he?"*

Adrian trembled slightly, and the barest hints of a smirk formed on Voldemort's face.

"Who am I to resist such a beautiful creature," Voldemort hissed, receiving a low rumble of pleasure from his familiar.

He twisted his wand, and from the air alone, conjured a poodle.

Nagini nearly trilled in excitement, lunging at the canine and coiling around its body with muscles as thick as a grown man's thigh.

"Ditty will show you to your room," Voldemort sighed, "*don't* interfere with my work, boy. Understand?"

Adrian stumbled out a quick, "Yes, father."

Thankfully, he would only have to wait until Bellatrix returned.

Days passed, weeks passed, and Adrian felt melancholy and the bitter humor that was his life claw through his bones.

'Bellatrix will come back soon,' He assured himself anxiously.

Bellatrix never did.

Practice

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian misses Bella, cooks an apple, and tries to make a shield.

Chapter Notes

This Chapter was not beta'd so any errors are my fault.
This chapter is an interlude between years 2 and 3.

Bellatrix and the Lestrange brothers were taken into custody by the British Ministry of Magic, for countless acts of terrorism and extensive use of illegal Dark Arts.

They were served a life sentence in Azkaban, and their estate seized by the government as evidence for a nonexistent trial. The information was passed along to Adrian's father almost immediately due to his ministry ties. The public was quick to celebrate.

Word of the arrest spread faster than the court issued search warrant. Adrian was able to call upon the Lestrange house elves and order them to remove everything of Adrian's from the building. There was to be no proof or sign that Adrian existed.

From there, evidence had to remain to suggest that the house was actually being lived in; beds had to remain unkempt, the questionably edible cake Bella had made earlier that day sat out untouched, and the training room still messy from the blasting curses and burn marks.

Lutain appeared in the hands of a terrified House Elf. The magical creature nearly *screamed* as it practically flung Lutain towards the bed. The bed was the only spot in Adrian's room that wasn't magically being filled with boxes and random knick-knacks.

"Master?" Lutain grumbled, disoriented and confused with the sudden change as well as his sudden flight through the air, *"Where are we, Master?"*

Adrian grabbed Lutain and rapidly began to slide his fingers down the soft scales behind his neck. The action was repeated, over and over as the room began to fill with books and trunks. The longer he spent tracing the scales and belly plates of his closest friend, the more relaxed he became. He was finally able to fight and dispel the rising nausea.

"Master?" Lutain was alarmed, seeing as the stack of trunks began to include the trunks of dark artifacts Bella had obtained over the years. That along with Adrian's uncharacteristic behaviour was starting to alarm the serpent.

"Master where is the witch?" Lutain asked, nearly flailing to break free from Adrian's grip.

"Bellatrix has been captured," Adrian choked out hoarsly, *"and imprisoned for life. We're going to live here, with Nagini and my father."*

Lutain stilled, looking at Adrian with the reptilian version of confusion, *"Live here? Den-mates with Nagini?"*

Adrian smiled softly and stroked Lutain's chin and the small bulges of his jaw muscles, *"She asked about you earlier. She likes you, you know."*

Lutain cheered up, looking eager to find his serpentine companion.

Something empty was carving a cavern in Adrian's throat, *"I'm glad you have a friend."*

The unspoken *'Now that Bella is gone'* rang loudly in the silence.

"Oh Master." Lutain sighed, voice conveying pity and sorrow.

"No!" Adrian snapped, standing sharply and knocking the snake off of him. *"You said it yourself a long time ago. There's no use having friends when they'll always leave you in the end."*

"Master, the witch did not mean to leave you." Lutain argued.

"If she really cared," Adrian snapped out, ignoring the feeling that something was crying inside, *"she wouldn't have gotten herself captured."*

"Mast-"

"She's just as bad as the Potters!" Adrian spat out, stalking to the door and slamming it on his way out.

The first time Adrian ran into his father, he found the older man in a clearly muggle kitchen.

It was old, equipped with stone countertops but rather rustic stoves and refrigeration. The accessories looked like they hadn't ever been used, leaving Adrian to only guess where the food was actually stored.

His father, holding a half eaten red apple in one hand observed him with a bored expression. It was unsettling, mostly because Adrian had the mental image of some horrific pale creature resembling the mandrake root body his father had inhabited before.

Seeing his father looking so positively normal was a sort of terror unique to itself that somehow was more horrific than even a face mauled by werewolf claws.

And as such, Adrian froze in the doorway feeling his entire body go cold.

"Well?" The older man sighed, voice tinged with annoyance, "are you going to stand there all day?"

Adrian mechanically walked into the kitchen and quietly sat on a chair.

His father eyed him critically and bit the apple again. The crunching sound drew an instinctive flinch from the boy.

The crimson eyes were terrifying, they unnerved him and watched his every move as his hands curled into fists under the table.

"You're so *terrified,"* his father dryly stated, somehow sounding pleased with the arrangement.

"It seems, that I owe you gratitude for returning my diary to myself."

Adrian's head jerked around and watched in bafflement as his father snatched a plate of tarts from somewhere hidden. Voldemort walked over, setting the glass platter onto the table with a loud clatter. The tarts shook slightly, almost bouncing off of the gilded surface.

The tall figure slid into the chair opposite of Adrian and arched one expressive eyebrow into an inquisitive look. Adrian timidly reached out and selected one of the flaking pastries from the dish. His father didn't look any more pleased but he didn't look insulted either, Adrian assumed he was in the clear.

"I was informed of your progress, prior to Bellatrix's...*absence,"* Voldemort's nose wrinkled in distaste, ″I've been led to believe you are adequate with spellwork."

Adrian wisely didn't respond.

His father cleanly placed the remaining apple core on the table between then, just shy of the pastries. "Burn it."

Adrian swallowed and let the bubbling rush drag through his body in a dissociated exhale. His vision warped, tunneling slightly as the apple smoldered a pathetically wispy plume of white smoke. It thickened slightly, before sputtering pathetically.

Adrian felt like he was on the edge of desperation. If he couldn't satisfy his father, then it was likely that he would be disposed of.

He *needed* it to burn. From that desperation and incentive something in Adrian's skull squeezed his brain *just so*; the apple burst alight with a shimmering orange flame.

He watched the fire burn and char the remnants of the apple until it was a shriveled thing. It proved a distraction to avoid the man sitting across the table from him- until he felt strong fingers grasp his jaw and force his head upright.

At once the fire ceased, and he found himself inhaling sharply at the sight of the deep scarlet irises surrounding oval pupils. It was an uncanny reminder of the events in the chamber, which his father also grabbed his jaw and observed his face for resemblance. This time though, the scarlet eyes were not surveying his features. They were locked with mesmerizing force on his own eyes and searing into his memory.

He felt a buzzing in his skull as his mental barriers were nearly obliterated. They were pathetic, even with the pride that Adrian had felt with their construction.

Adrian was breathing heavily as he felt sharp needles stab into varying levels of his consciousness. A low tingling buzz near his spine warped with the sensation of an Eagle's quill jamming just behind his left eye.

He could feel a low whimper slip from his mouth as the thorny presence withdrew from his mind; the scarlet eyes broke contact and left Adrian reeling and withholding tremors.

He could tell his father was disturbed over *something*; he could tell in that small portion back in his skull which always instinctively told him how his father felt.

Then, metaphorically before his eyes, the presence of his father's emotions retracted.

"Fascinating," His father murmured under his breath, glancing off at a point past Adrian's left ear.

His father lifted a long pale finger, pressing it to his own temple to heighten concentration. The dark eyes flickered back to Adrian who quickly looked away.

Adrian kept searching in his mind, navigating around the wreckage of his occlumency walls to investigate the portion which felt numbingly separated.

Then it opened, unveiling like an eyelid to stare into the ruins of Adrian's mind. With an absence of subtly or caution, something intruded with searing black limbs *from* it. Squirming limbs of a thousand octopus' grasping and reaching and *touching*.

Adrian gasped outright, collapsing heavily against his chair as the sensation of cold water filled his skull. It was spreading, filling him and leaving jaw chattering tremors in its grasps.

He was torn away from his own eyes, his vision darkening as his mind separated from his own sense of sight and sound. He was wrapped and entangled in the confines of something long and nimble; endless with no distinction between head, body, and tail.

The *thing* hissed something wordless and without meaning. It tightened, stealing his withheld breath and caressing his flesh like a dementor's grasp.

Then it was retracting slowly and leaving Adrian alone.

Adrian gasped something discourteously and blinked.

His eyes somehow recovered from their blindness. He was once again aware of his own body and how his limbs had spasmed and curled in. He pried his limbs away from where he had hunkered into a fetal position on the chair. He jolted his head upwards from the strange position it had been holding. He didn't remember holding his neck so stiffly during the...

"None of that," His father hushed without kindness, voice loud against the pulsing in his head.

Adrian swallowed and shakily wiped aside the tears that cascaded down his cheeks. His hands were curling tightly into his trousers, the knuckles burning with the intensity of his grasp. Water brushed down his cheeks in a tickling sensation, dripping from his chin onto the polished floor. He was crying- in front of his *father*...

"Those muggles," the elder mused, voice sharp and cutting in the air.

"The...*Dursely* family?" His father asked out loud although his tone was entirely rhetoric.

"Don't hurt them." Adrian's voice was automatic, he paled once he realized his flaw, "I- I meant please, Father."

His father had a frown curling on his lips. His eyes seemed to glow and once again Adrian felt himself quivering.

"How long have you had access to my mind?"

Adrian's eyes widened in shock and noticeable confusion. "I...What?"

In return, the presense in his mind made itself noticeable once more with a pulsing flare. It almost echoed a heartbeat, slower and deeper than Adrian's own fluttering.

"That?" Adrian asked, voice nearly a whisper as he felt it leave a soothing sting in its wake, like the burn of hot water after a bitter cold.

"Always," Adrian tried to speak firmly, mentally criticising himself as his voice cracked uncomfortably partway through.

His father frowned, displeased with his answer.

"*Always?"*

Adrian was right, he *was* displeased.

"I take it Bellatrix didn't place the chalice in your room, then."

Chalice? What chalice?

"No," Voldemort scoffed, blinking quickly in thought while a thin finger tapped against his lips.

"Perhaps... *boy."*

Adrian's head snapped around to stare at his father once more.

The man drew his wand this time, and Adrian couldn't help but flinch away from the dangerous weapon.

The wand slowly pointed at his face, carressing his jaw and cheekbone before resting on the bridge between his eyes and eyebrows.

Eyes once more locked together.

Red met green.

His father bit out, *"Legilimens."*

Adrian struggled to consciousness with the exhaustion of spending an all day awake. His head throbbed and he felt like something was compressing his chest.

No, something *was* compressing his chest. Something long and somewhat chilled.

"Master!" Lutain hissed excitedly, sliding his way over and onto Adrian's chest, *"You are awake!"*

"Get off me Lutain," Adrian slurred, blinking awake exhaustedly and knocking aside his excited serpent, *"My head is killing me,"*

"Likely due to the hour I spent unravelling the lamentable shields you called Occlumency."

Adrian jolted awake, recognizing the voice neither as Lutain or Nagini. He struggled to right himself, pressing his back flush to the wooden headboard.

His father was sitting in a chair, reading a book near the foot of the bed. The book closed with a clatter. It was thrown onto the bed near Adrian's feet.

"They would jeopardize your work at Hogwarts," his father drawled, a small smirk playing on his lips, "A greeting gift, from father to son."

Adrian blinked in confusion and in slight amusement at how awkwardly the words sounded. He had no idea what the man meant.

What gift? The book? Adrian couldn't read the cover from where it landed upside down. It looked

old and well beyond his own reading level.

If not the book, what else did the man mean?

Adrian poked around in his mind, preparing to scrape over the mess of his walls- before brushing against something secure and *strong*.

"How-" Adrian blurted out without thinking, testing the barriers; they were more impressive than anything he could cumulatively structure over *years.*

"It seems that there is a connection between us," his father explained regally and politely, "a passageway from my mind, to yours."

"You felt true feelings, Master!" Lutain enthused, butting his snout against Adrian's arm excitedly, *"You spoke true! Not yours but felt!"*

"Indeed, he is rather observant," his father slipped into Parseltongue easily while holding one arm out for Lutain to coil through the fingers.

"Remarkable for his age." His father admitted after a slight pause, not bothering to look at Adrian as he complimented him.

"Silly hatchling," Lutain agreed, flexing his body between the nimble fingers.

Adrian wanted to grab his familiar and pull him from the older man's arm.

"The shields will last against that headmaster of yours. Of course, I'll make sure they're still operating on a regular schedule. Be sure not to challenge him directly, it will only arise suspicion as to why yours are now so advanced."

"Will you be entering my mind again, Father?" Adrian scraped out hoarsely, bowing his head to appear as humble as he possibly could in the situation.

"None of that," his father scowled, crossing his leg over his knee.

"You are *not* a servant."

"I..." Adrian's breathing stuttered and left him awkwardly pausing in the middle of his thought.. He wasn't a servant? He had been led to believe he would become a Death Eater once he had matured enough to partake in raids.

"You're my heir," his father explained stiffy, "My followers are expendable. *You*, are not."

Adrian's mouth fell open quietly in shock.

"You are to be raised as a weapon," Voldemort continued, swiping his hand to adjust his dark hair from his eyes.

"A weapon-"

"*But,* given recent information that has now presented itself, that has changed."

Adrian looked at the equally baffled Lutain.

"You are to be trained," Voldemort continued as if Adrian understood everything he was saying, "Originally Bellatrix was to be your teacher. Given her absence and your new position, I shall be

your teacher."

Lutain tensed, staring at Adrian with resignation.

"You?" Adrian nearly whispered out, eyes wide with a mixture of fear and fascination.

Voldemort stood, glancing back at Adrian with some sort of amusement, "I would not kill something precious to me."

Adrian echoed back the word in a considerably higher pitch, "*Precious*?"

Voldemort smiled something wicked, and left the room. Adrian could have sworn that his father's eyes glowed.

Adrian hit the ground painfully with a crunching rattle that vibrated through his left shoulder.

The curse soared over his head, leaving him safe for only a moment. Adrian scrambled to his feet, already attempting to run to avoid the next flying spell.

Each spell was lazily flung at him; nothing difficult yet *obviously* the caster was enjoying himself.

"Incendio," He heard the voice loudly drawl, a pathetic first year spell just to *spite him.* Adrian yelped as a plume of fire nearly incinerated him, something impossibly strong for a first year spell. Adrian almost doubted that it even *was* that spell, even as he heard it cast.

"Aguamenti," Adrian gasped out, hacking from the sudden soot in the air. The water collided upwards to snuff out a small portion of the flame. It hissed angrily, erupting in a dark plume of steam

The *fire...* Adrian couldn't see anything through the inferno. It meant that his attacker wouldn't be able to either.

Adrian's eyesight tunneled and his vision flickered. He swooned, nearly collapsing as his head *ached* against the painful pressure. He coughed, nearly rolling into the movement which transformed into a dry retch. The ground around him sparked and flared with heat, adding to the stifling temperatures.

"Come on," He breathed exhaustedly, swallowing harshly against bile as his magic fluttered and the flames began to falter, "Come *on,"*

They grew, dancing around him in a careful circle of fire, concealing him and protecting him in the middle of the blaze.

He released the nauseating pressure, allowing the tongues to lick the floor hungrily; he keeled and braced his arms on his knees for a moment to catch his breath.

"Alright," he whispered under his breath, trying not to cough as he struggled to focus- where had all the spells been coming from?

He pointed his wand in the desired location, and with as much hope and blind luck he could feel at the moment, whispered the spell he had learned from Theo.

"Langlock," He casted, seeing the nearly invisible spell shoot off and counted to three.

The flames lowered like a curtain dropping and Adrian felt himself beam as his father glared at

him, tongue glued to the roof of his mouth.

He was too exhausted to laugh but he felt the bubble of hysterical glee press on his chest. He felt winded and exhilarated from *finally* getting higher ground...

Then he felt winded for real, as the air from his lungs suddenly was yanked out.

Adrian's eyes bulged and he fell to the ground, hands clawing at his throat as he gasped soundlessly. Almost at once, the sensation left; his father waved a contorted hand over his face, silently casting the counter spell.

"You forget that you are not unique in your ability to cast wandless and wordless magic." His father explained calmly, eyes almost flickering in the reflections of the surviving embers decorating the floor.

Adrian grinned silently, "Doesn't mean I didn't get you." He wheezed, his throat burning from the effort.

His father flicked his wand without even looking, accurately sending a minor stinging hex. Adrian yelped and hissed in pain once it hit; his shoulder throbbed mutedly from his botched dive for the ground once the blaze started.

"Why didn't you shield?" his father asked critically, looking him over for major injuries while absentmindedly conjuring two chairs.

"I wanted to dodge, make a distraction instead," Adrian shrugged with one shoulder, already feeling that his tactic was lacking. His father gave a heavy sigh, as if he too had assumed Adrian's strategy would be ridiculous.

Adrian used his forearms to pull himself upwards, clambering over to settle into the conjured chair with a small grimace.

"Evasion is not a reliable tactic," Voldemort scoffed although his tone made it seem that he had repeated that phrase to others often.

Adrian shrugged, keeping his head low and relying on how much his father *hated* when he stewed.

"That's not the real reason," Voldemort spoke lowly, although not as threateningly as he was well capable of. The man ran one of his long pale hands through his hair, shifting the bluish strands to rest behind his ear.

Adrian checked his shields to assure himself that they were still in tact. He still knew better than to flat out lie to the man, plus it was unlikely he would be cursed for simply not having been taught.

"I can't cast it," Adrian muttered under his breath, admiting the truth although not being especially happy about it.

"Bellatrix never taught me to shield." Adrian elaborated once his Father pulled his hands up to rest them under his chin in a long suffering look of annoyance.

"She likes to have her targets run like headless chickens" Adrian almost smiled at how pinched his father's voice sounded. Obviously he had problems with a similar tactic before, although he still spoke of Adrian's mother figure fondly.

"Then we'll have to teach you. Come."

"What... *now?"* Adrian gaped, stumbling to his feet whereas his father gracefully rose, "I...I don't know an incantation-"

"I'll show you," Voldemort stared at Adrian as if his child had said something momentously idiotic, which, Adrian considered, he likely had.

"The incantation is *protego,"* his father instructed, drawing his wand before flicking his wand and summoning the whitish shield spell insanely quickly.

"I..." Adrian elegantly articulated around how fat his tongue felt in his mouth. He struggled to recall what he had just seen, as well as what he had heard. After using wandless magic, his head always pounded like there was a Manticore loose in his skull.

"Watch," his father sighed yet repeated the action considerably slower. He didn't seem as irritated as he led on, in fact, Adrian suspected the man actually liked teaching

Voldemort casted the spell once again, performing it in careful slow motion of the actual process. Adrian knew casting any sort of spell in such a slowed state actually was *more* difficult than normal casting. Of course, if anyone could do it, it would be him.

Once, twice, three times more until he lowered his wand and looked at Adrian expectantly.

"Er..." Adrian stumbled, pulling out his Holly and Phoenix feather wand he used *only* inside the house and out of public eye.

"Protigo-"

"Pro-Tay-go," his father repeated, nodding for Adrian to continue.

"Protego." Adrian corrected himself, trying to flick his wand in the semi circular movement his father had executed before. It was awkward and jerky in his grasp.

They repeated it for a long period of time, until the pounding in Adrian's head was reaching a crescendo.

His father was actually a *very* good teacher, Adrian knew he made much more progress than he would have otherwise.

By the time Adrian was panting and bracing his head between his knees protectively and the ground was swirling ever so slightly from his small vantage point, he could summon the barest film of a protective barrier.

A considerable improvement.

He found himself actually looking forward to the next dueling practice.

Mourning

Chapter Summary

Where Skylar cries and the sky is suspiciously clear.

Chapter Notes

This chapter was actually written as a request from a review. It messed up my table of contents for all my written chapters so I hope you enjoy my struggles.

Skylar hated wearing the black suit, designed off of muggle clothing yet incorporated into classic wizarding clothing. It was soft and smooth, woven with cooling charms since Skylar wore it every year. At least, every year for the past four years.

The fabric was imbued with the scent of lavender and the barely there trace of poppy. Skylar never knew that poppy had a smell but now it was overwhelming.

Skylar exhaled through his nose slowly, peering at his reflection in the mirror quietly. He watched numbly as his reflection moved to button up the highest button on his shirt, leaving him composed and clean.

He walked out of his room, slowly moving down the stairs towards the front sitting room where he knew his mother would be fussing over a perfect bouquet of flowers. Icelandic poppies, thin tissue paper petals in almost every color Skylar could imagine.

"Oh," his mother exhaled while her mouth twisted into a teary eyed smile, "are you ready to go?"

Skylar nodded slightly, tugging on the worn cuffs on each sleeve.

"Your father sent word earlier, he and Sirius are just about done over there."

Skylar already knew this, but he nodded quietly as the two walked out of their safeguarded house and past the elaborate wards to the Apparation zone. They vanished in a sharp twist that was nothing for Skylar after Quidditch and years of experience.

The summer sky was unusually cold, cool and chilled from a recent rain. The ground squished slightly from under his polished shoes. He had the urge to take them off and take off the grey socks and press his toes through the muck.

Crickets and other invests chirped loudly, adding to the lively buzz of a summer field. The sky above was suspiciously clear of clouds, most likely spelled.

It didn't remove the stifling humidity, already Skylar felt sweat gather at the back of his neck. Somewhere over the grass, a red winged blackbird swooped low over the growing corn.

"This way, on the far side of the house." Lily Potter gently nudged her son forward. Skylar began

trudging forward, not noticing anything else around them.

There was gentle music, heard before the many chairs and tables came into sight. On the highest rise of the lawn, a half circle of people stood under the sun in uncomfortable clothing all in shades of black.

"Lily!" Someone cried, stumbling down the slight hill to trudge in mud to her side. Mrs. Weasley's face was blotchy and red, eyes bloodshot and filled with misery.

"Molly," Skylar's mother soothed, taking the plump woman into her arms and clinging to her tightly, "I am *so* sorry."

Molly pulled away, trying to smile and laugh dismissively although it sounded choked and painful.

Two more people slid away from the congregation, sliding down to flank Skylar's sides.

"Hey, come with us, mate." One of the twins urged, giving him a gentle pat on the back. The other looped one arm through his arm and gently tugged him along.

It was surreal, to witness something so quiet and unsettling in broad daylight. Skylar had long since grown used to the sound of his mother crying behind closed doors. To see it in the open was something unreal.

Everything he was seeing was unreal.

The twins led him out of the thickest of people over towards the back steps of the crooked house itself. Over there in the shade, the mugginess was less stifling.

"You want to stay out of that mess, mate." One of them advised, the other plopped down to his other side on the steps, "it's just a bunch of crying. Figured you've had enough of that."

Skylar did, he had enough of that for a lifetime.

"Where's Ron?" Skylar asked, his voice sounding hoarse and croaky even in his own ears.

Fred, Skylar decided, paused and then exhaled heavily, "He's been up in his room. Hasn't come down for days since we started getting the details down."

"Blew a right fit at mum the other day, when she tried to drag him out." George shrugged, the two tricksters looking relatively normal with how depressing the entire situation was.

There was a loud snap in the air as another person arrived to the event, wading from the furthest edge of the field. The headmaster, Skylar could spot him out in a crowd of a thousand people. The aged wizard removed his hat slowly, clutching it to his chest as he bowed his head toward the many murmuring people.

"Surprised he showed up," George noted, seeing the headmaster's arrival.

"Reckon he's been blaming himself over it all." Fred ended with a small click of his tongue.

"Well, he *should* be." A sour voice growled out from behind the three, accompanied with the rattling noise of the screen door banging shut.

"The troll emerges from his hibernation," Fred bitterly trilled out, George lifting his hands to mimic large floppy ears.

Ron flushed angrily, the red moving all the way past his cheeks to touch his forehead for a surprise.

"How are you two *laughing!"* He shrieked, voice cracking and instantly killing the mood.

Skylar felt a lump form in his throat as his jaw dropped, he was speechless.

"How can you just...just…" Ron struggled for a word, his lips twisting into a grimace and tears leaked from his eyes, "How can you act like you don't *care!"*

"Don't you say that," Fred hissed back angrily, George hurrying over to grab his upper arm as a precaution, "Don't you *dare* say that."

"Well you're laughing and making jokes and and…" Ron's hands flailed, "and acting like *Merlin knows-"*

"Maybe *some* of us are trying to help out around here instead of pouting and throwing a fit in their room!" Fred spat out, nearly prickling in his anger, "Great job making mum even *sadder*, *Ronnikins."*

Ron looked like he was going to pull his wand and start cursing the twins.

"Stop this," Skylar leapt to his feet, his heart pounding like a hummingbird.

"You!" Ron shouted now directing his anger at Skylar, "Why didn't...why didn't you *do something?"*

Fred and George leapt forward, "Come on now, Sky here's not guilty of *anything."*

"He's the *Chosen One!"* Ron screamed, his voice louder than ever before. "He should have *saved my sister!"*

The steady murmurs of the group over on the hill trailed off painfully quiet. Skylar was all too aware of the many eyes locked on his body. The black formal clothes felt tighter, like he was being constricted.

"Ron, I…" Skylar trailed off as he felt the itchiness of tears nearly overwhelm him. His throat hurt and his hands were shaking at his side.

"Ignore him, mate," Fred advised sourly, glaring angrily at Ron.

Ron was right, Skylar *should* have saved her.

"No, he's right." Skylar was whispering, not noticing the other adults start to draw closer and prevent the imminent fight, "I... I *should* have done something."

"Yeah you should have," Ron hissed out angrily, tears cascading down his blotchy face although he didn't wipe them away, "You *killed her!"*

Skylar flinched as if he had been struck.

"Ron!" Someone older belted out, brushing past Skylar and the twins with an expression of fury. "This is not the *time."*

The older Weasley, Charlie, Skylar recognized from the age and slightly puckered burn scar on his neck, grabbed Ron's upper arm and started to drag him back inside the house.

"You killed her!" Ron screamed, thrashing in Charlie's grip as he glared and sobs shook his small body, "You *killed her!"*

Skylar felt someone rotate him by his shoulder and without looking he sobbed into the chest of whoever it was. He felt another body at his back, successfully muffling the noise of Ron's shrieking and isolating him from the outside.

"Is everything okay over here?" Mr. Weasley spoke, placing one hand on each of the twins. From the securing circle the two boys made, Skylar's sobs could faintly be heard.

"Fine," George clipped out, glaring at the general vicinity of where Charlie had dragged Ron inside, "We're gonna take little Sky out back to calm down a bit."

James Potter arrived, running lightly over the lawn with a flushed worried expression. The murmurs from the direction of the tables began rising once again, filling the air with the sound of chatter.

"Everything alright?" James asked concerned, looking inside the protective dome with paternal instincts.

"Sounds like Ron had a bit of an outburst, James." Mr. Weasley sighed, running both hands into his tired eyes, "The boys are going to take him around back, maybe to look at the chickens."

James gave a slight nod and looked at the two twins with a sorrowful look.

"Head up, boys," He smiled grimly, ruffling their hair with a small exhale, "It gets better."

The two adults walked off, ignoring the disgusting squelching of grass and mud. The twins held Skylar close, watching the house and windows for movement before they retracted their arks carefully.

"Sky? Mate?" The one asked, peering at the blubbering twelve year old cautiously, "We're going to head around back for a bit, look at some chickens and imagine they're Ron."

Skylar smiled slightly against his will and he nodded slightly into whoever's shirt he had essentially soiled. He let it go, wiping his face and nose quickly to dispel the disgusting amounts of snot.

Each twin took a hand, and between the two they swung his arms ridiculously in such a way Skylar found himself smiling despite the gloom. They made their way carefully around the house, approaching the coop where several hens clucked curiously.

Skylar instantly went to the hutch, opening the hatches to peer at the startled birds who observed him with nervous glances.

Fred poked around, scaring the bird away as he retrieved an egg. It was light brown, speckled slightly around the top.

With no grace or hesitation, he smacked it over George's head. The latter spluttered, reaching upwards to investigate the yellow yolk which dripped down his nose.

Skylar laughed, an ugly gasping noise but it was a laugh nonetheless.

George sniffed and reached into the opened latch, grabbing a bird and throwing it right at Fred who fell backwards at the flailing hen.

Skylar laughed again, this time the sound was almost peals of laughter bordering on hysteria.

The twins looked at each other in relief, before flopping onto the ground. Thankfully, nearest the coop the ground was still dry, if only a bit dusty.

Skylar settled down near them, playing with strands of grass through the holes in the wire. The hens approached curiously, pecking at small ants or at the strands of grass Skylar poked through.

"He's right," Skylar spoke, voice quiet in the silence of the summer sky, "that I killed her."

Fred glanced at George quickly, "No, mate that isn't your fault."

"Yeah, even Dumbledore tried looking for the Chamber. It's been gone for centuries, you couldn't have found it."

"No, not that." Skylar felt something bubble inside his chest, under his ribs and above his heart, "I-I've *killed* people."

"No you haven't." The two boys spoke at once, synchronizing accidently yet still sounding firm.

"I *have!"* Skylar protested, voice warbling into a shriek as tears cascaded down his face. The relative calm he had crafted shattered brokenly with his words.

"No, no mate." Fred argued sternly, grasping the smaller boy and holding him close with one arm.

"You did your best, and you were a good friend." George added with only a little wavering of his own voice, "Gin really liked you."

Skylar shook his head, the tears and his movement distorted his vision as words bubbled from his lips and everything he had kept so private was unraveling under his fingertips. "No no no…"

George glanced at Fred with barely disguised fear and frantic desperation.

"I killed her," Skylar sobbed, hands rising to clutch his hair between shaking palms, "I've killed her and...And I didn't mean to and now she's dead."

Fred patted Skylar unsure, buckling as the younger boy twisted and collapsed heavily against him. The chickens clucked unconcerned and pecked at the dropped strand of grass.

"You couldn't have done anything," Fred shushed, speaking lowly even as his body soon shook gently in his own grief, "you couldn't have done anything and Merlin knows everyone tried."

Skylar braced his head in Fred's chest and *screamed.*

George didn't say anything but looked very much that he wanted to join in.

"I'm so sorry," Skylar bawled, voice barely comprehendible, "I...I didn't mean to."

Fred rubbed his back in a way he hoped was soothing, looking blankly at the feathered birds.

Skylar pulled back aggressively, jolting upright as he furiously rubbed at his face, "It's not fair, people die for me and it's not *fair."*

"Sky…" George started, only to be cut off with Skylar's watery eyed glare.

"*No!* First...first Harry and now Ginny and…" Skylar shook his head, hunkering his shoulders as

his hands pressed harshly into his eyes.

"Harry?" Fred tentatively asked, not familiar with anyone who Skylar knew and was familiar with to be on a nickname with.

Skylar sobbed openly, "and...and we never found his body either."

"Who's Harry?" Fred asked gently, recognizing that somehow this other name was tied in to Skylar's deteriorated state.

The boy in question peered up at both of them, face skewed and pinched in an expression of pain as he bubbled out between shaking lips, "He...he *was* my *brother."*

The twins froze in fascination, confusion, and mutual grief.

"He…" Skylar shook, struggling to think through the hazy fog of mourning, "It wasn't safe, and...and we sent him to be w-with my cousins…"

Fred and George felt a chill down their arms; the unsettling knowledge that they *shouldn't* be listening to this.

"We only left him for a couple years, because there were wizards after us," Skylar sniffled, steadily growing calmer the longer he talked. The more the words spilled out the faster Skylar's voice broke the air; the more horrified the twins listened.

"And, and we went back, and my cousins were gone. Just…" Skylar lifted one shaking hand, shaped in a fist. He opened it suddenly, revealing nothing and exhaling quietly, *"Poof."*

"Sky…" Fred started, rubbing Skylar's shoulders unsure. Skylar shook his head determined, his tremors lessening as he stared at the chickens almost angrily.

"No, no I...I need to talk." Skylar argued intently, "I...we looked for him. For months, and...and one of Dumbledore's friends found my cousin's family outside Glasgow."

Skylar sniffed quietly and a small breeze ruffled through the humid air.

"I...they didn't say, but I overheard when they thought I was sleeping. They said that Bellatrix Lestrange got to them." Skylar whispered quietly, blinking rapidly against his will, "Mum went bonkers."

"Bellatrix, that bitch will get what's coming to her." George spat out, eyes narrowing in fury towards the idea of the witch, "Azkaban's too nice for her."

Skylar nodded slightly, faintly smiling as if the idea amused him, "Dad's been working since, trying to get her off the streets. He can finally breathe now that they got her."

Fred swallowed and looked across the fields, the swaying of the corn and the bright glare of the sun. "I'm sorry about your brother."

"I'm sorry about your sister." Skylar countered sharply.

Fred shrugged, rolling one shoulder as if disinterested although Skylar knew better.

"I hope she burns," Skylar whispered quietly, "does that make me a bad person?"

"Of course not," George assured him quietly, "It makes you human."

Skylar smiled slightly, not truly seeing as he was trapped in memory.

"I miss him sometimes," Skylar admitted brokenly.

"You should, I bet he was just as reckless as you." Fred teased only halfheartedly.

"No, he liked animals. Would have been a bloody good magizoologist."

"Ginny liked those horses, the winged ones." George admitted quietly.

"Harry would have known every breed, he'd give Newt Scamander a run for his money." Skylar laughed brokenly, smiling as if the idea was perfect, "and he would have had a kneezle, or some rare owl I'd never heard of but he'd pester Dad all about it. And he'd have it flown in from somewhere, like Egypt."

"Egypt has owls?" George asked curiously, smiling faintly as Skylar rolled his eyes.

"What about his classes?" Fred asked quietly, egging Skylar on.

"Oh, he'd be *brilliant* at Care," Skylar continued, tears lessening as a true smile spread over his face, "he'd be quizzing and asking Hagrid about everything. He was always shy but he always tried to drag Mooney to those ah, traveling creature tours."

"I heard from Charlie about the dragon your first year," George teased with a grin, "I bet he'd have been in on that."

Skylar laughed, a bright peal of laughter that seemed to echo, "Oh Merlin's Beard, he'd be camping out in the hut all night waiting for Norbert to hatch! He never liked Quidditch but he'd be there, at every game in the stands cheering me on." Skylar's smile began to turn wistful, "He *should* be in the stands."

"Yeah," Fred sighed sourly.

"They both should be."

Juncture

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian settles in, is protective of Lutain, and wants to make his father proud

Chapter Notes

This chapter was Beta'd by Arctic Fox From Afar, thanks to them I've cranked this out for all of you. Enjoy!

"Are you an Animagus?"

Voldemort didn't bother to look up from where he was writing with a black quill, "No. I found the time and commitment needed for such a transformation useless. The inability to select your alternate form presented the chance that the effort would go to something pathetic. I decided to focus my attention on more useful skills."

Adrian bit his tongue and chewed on it slightly. He felt the itching desire to learn more and inquire about what *exactly* was more important than an Animagus form. His father wasn't wrong, it was still possible Adrian had an entirely useless or pathetic alternate form. He could see where his father was coming from.

"What did you learn instead?" Adrian asked, trying to sound as careless as he could. He knew instantly that he failed when his father glanced at him intently from the corner of his eyes. The red of the iris was breathtaking and intimidating all at once.

A small cruel smile twisted the corner of his face, pupils shifting ever so slightly to something more oval than normal.

"Things far beyond your level of understanding and competence."

Adrian, subdued, nodded and looked back at his book - there were only so many spellbooks he could read over summer break. He was indulging himself with an elaborate book on the habits of Grindylow and Merpeople, creatures commonly misunderstood and often misrepresented, but thankfully, his father had no objections to his interest.

It could be useful, at times, to have trivial facts on vampires or werewolves.

"With your occlumency now, it would be relatively simple to achieve an animagus transformation." His father's lidded eyes did nothing to hide the piercing look behind them."Of course, that would be once your spellwork has reached acceptable performance."

"Of course, father." Adrian smiled slightly, feeling conflictingly at ease and still cautious in the room. His father had the disorienting habit of complimenting him so carefully and verbally backslapping him the next second. It left him nearly dizzy, yet never dispelled the warmth in his

stomach and his silent croon at the praise; no matter the insult directly after.

Bellatrix's arrest had only been the start of a wild summer. Initially, Adrian walked as if he was on twigs. He nearly never left his room, when he did he sent Lutain out with him to scout the hallways to assure the boy nobody was there. Adrian had seen the strange fondness his father had for serpents, it seemed to him that Lutain was more safe than he was.

He wasn't sure at the start if his father was as crazy or wild as Bellatrix was. He was the *Dark Lord*, after all. He might not have been the same wizard who tried to kill him as a baby, but he was still infinitely cunning and capable.

And as it turned out, he was; but in a much more dangerous way than she was.

Bellatrix was an uncontrollable storm, a tornado of chaos and impulsivity with no regard for ramifications. She would injure and then coddle and croon her apologies before inflicting wounds once more. His father...he wasn't like that.

He was worse.

He was honeyed words and careful movements, everything casual and calculated to the degree that Adrian fell he was falling into role of a script.

Adrian tried spontaneity, trying to break the mold he was trapped in. Even trying to surprise the other man only left Adrian stumbling, as if everything he did, his father was already prepared for. It felt that he was stumbling on a frozen stream, no matter which way he turned and walked he only found himself following the cold trail and threatening to slip.

His father didn't hurt him, but the man seemed to *know* Adrian in a way which left the boy feeling so terribly exposed. The Dark Lord would say barely anything, yet two or three words spoken so calmly had the ability to tear Adrian to shreds or leave him basking in a glow stronger by far than Bellatrix's affection. How Adrian *longed* for such praise, the simple acts of paternal affection that were followed with such loving lacerations to his heart and flesh, leaving him trembling and crawling on the polished floor.

Nagini was a unique balm that he hadn't anticipated, her heavy bulk and weight felt like the soothing numb of disinfectant in a wound. Assuring and pleasant against the sting, and his instinct to recoil away from it.

Yet it was worth it when his father's eyes nearly shimmered, widening with such surreal light Adrian could swear they would glow in the dark.

He would casually remark about something, a simple observation. And how Adrian *hungered desperately* to make that observation into praise- into a smile and a proud glance that left his blood singing.

Nagini watched him silently the nights where he was left curled helplessly in a ball. Sometimes he made it to his bed, staining blankets magically cleaned the next day, and sometimes he would be left prone in the training room, wracked with tremors as his body shook to stave off the pain of phantom sensations he couldn't process anymore. She watched over him as a silent protector, a statue on the altar of Adrian's devotion.

Lutain always said that Nagini's scales shone brighter in person; from all the nights he spotted her bulk watching him silently in the dark, Adrian was beginning to agree.

"Master is speaking to guest inside the office." Nagini hissed, lying entangled with his legs in her massive coils, her large head nested near his own. Lutain flicked his tongue companionably, curled around Adrian's right forearm and his pillow.

"Who is it?" Adrian asked, stroking the long forehead of the python.

"The blonde," Nagini hissed, causing Lutain to perk up.

"Spawn of dragon-hatchling?" Lutain lifted his head upward, eyes bright.

"Draco's father?" Adrian blinked in confusion, his hisses faltering, *"What is he doing here?"*

"Crazy-lady, *they want her back."*

Adrian nearly sat upright. Bellatrix? They were planning to get *Bellatrix* back?

Internally he nearly grinned in excitement, and at the same time he was horrified to think that he would be forced to leave. He didn't want to go, he wanted to stay with his father here.

"I wish we knew what they were saying."

"I do." Nagini reared, lifting her weight onto her coils before headbutting Adrian's chest roughly, if still gently for a snake her size. *"Self, self?"*

"Nagini," Adrian winced and pushed her snout aside. "What are you-"

The tattoo slid out of his skin, flicking its tongue at Nagini, who flickered her tongue back at herself.

"Self." The real Nagini was satisfied, looking at the mark agreeably, *"What does Master say?"*

The tattoo twisted in acknowledgment and melted under his skin once more. The sensation made Adrian twitch.

How *brilliant,* he hadn't ever considered something like that before. He knew that the tattoo, the elaborate yet completely legal mark that covered his flesh worked as a messenger between the painting in his father's office and throne room. He hadn't ever considered using it as a spy, a way to learn more information he wasn't privy to.

Yet, was he actually not permitted to know the information? It wasn't him who had suggested the tattoo do it, it was Nagini who had summoned it with an eager butt of her nose. Adrian shouldn't be punished for the action of his familiar, yet something inside him cried out that maybe Nagini had summoned it on *purpose.* Maybe she was *trying* to get him in trouble.

No, she liked Lutain too much to go out of her way to try and injure Adrian.

Yet somehow the concept of summoning the tattoo was a little too advanced for her, something that seemed suspiciously beyond her understanding.

It curled and rolled under his flesh, tugging slowly like the uncomfortable feeling of Spell-O-Tape being pulled away from his skin. It tingled and itched like a burn, or a blister starting to peel.

"You're using me like a carrier pigeon." Adrian argued, not enjoying how the python was using his skin.

"I find pigeon," Lutain offered, wriggling excitedly at the prospect of using his own service.

Adrian almost smiled at how his familiar tried his best to accommodate his discomfort.

They waited in bated silence for the tattoo to slither back into view. It emerged from his thigh, sliding over a hip before reporting through fanged jaws, *"Raid in fall. Azkaban. Crazy-lady free with kin and den-mates, Demen-tears problem."*

Adrian smiled and stroked the tattoo appreciative. It was beautiful, yet morbidly nauseating to glance at knowing it was under his body. *"Thank you."*

It hissed welcomingly before fading away and leaving the three.

They were planning a raid on Azkaban? Fall was still a long time away, and Adrian didn't even know when exactly in fall this would be taking place. In fact, Adrian didn't know anything. He hadn't been told any details.

He was finding out about it from a *tattoo.*

Adrian knew that his father was aware that he and Bellatrix were close. Wouldn't it be logical for him to include Adrian on the planning to better manage her?

Unless his father didn't want Bellatrix and Adrian to meet or be together.

"*We'll have to wait and ask later,"* Adrian stated the obvious, stroking each of the serpent's scales soothingly. More for himself as his anxiety drifted again.

His insecurities and worries only heightened and intensified as all three drifted in and out of sleep in the afternoon heat.

"Where did my father find you?" Adrian asked, running his hand down Nagini's back once more.

The sun had begun to set, his father had called a meeting which led to the three to be confined to the room.

The light shone through the window in flickering tones of red and orange, lighting across Nagini's scales in bright shimmers, holding tints of deep green between the normal markings. Lutain's own skin, having lightened to an earthy brown for some odd reason, glowed like a smoldering fire from the sun's light. Nagini's awesome bulk was always awe inspiring, yet somehow she didn't quite hold the same beauty Lutain possessed with the changing colours of his dark and brown scales.

"Where found?" Nagini asked, humming lowly and contently from where she curled around Adrian, *"In store, near castle."*

"Hogwarts?" Adrian blinked in surprise, *"You mean the town, Hogsmeade?"*

Nagini gave a hum and lazily flicked her tongue against his cheek.

"Well, what else? Did he buy you?"

"Yes, expensive." Nagini coiled lightly on herself, seeming proud of her price. *"I was hatchling, small and cold. I spoke and Master heard, and asked me if I would serve him. I said yes and came with."*

"Nagini always speak well?" Lutain curled onto his master's chest. It was a good question, Lutain's own vocabulary was painfully simple when Adrian first found him. Nagini was able to hold entire conversations and even use sarcasm on the rare instance.

"No. Master use the magic and I learn the words, he speak and I become." She hissed, mouth opening to menacing proportions if not for her boastful words, *"Master make me great."*

"You were always strong, my beautiful," The three glanced up at the door where the tall red eyed man slipped past the previously locked doors. *"I just offered to you a greater opportunity for your potential."*

There was something pointed in the tone, and Adrian knew better than to think it was coincidental. His father had taken Nagini as a hatchling, sheltering her and nurturing her into a beautiful creation of lethal awe. He raised her and tended to her like a poisonous flower, as deadly and as tantalizing as opium from a poppy.

Then what was he, what was Adrian, supposed to be?

(Against his rationality, he felt like a kneezle; so eager to crawl to his feet and begging for his father's praise.)

Lutain had never quite obtaining the level of fear Adrian held for his father, and slithered over eagerly and gazing upwards expectantly.

A small smile graced thin lips as, wordlessly, a small mouse was conjured. Lutain struck it without thought, the mouse shrieking before slowly going still.

Lutain's coils pulsated, struggling to orient the mouse in a posture where the snake could better consume the creature. The rodent flailed, spasming post mortem in a gruesome display as small amounts of blood already dribbled across Lutain's body.

"You have a quick strike." his father mentioned, eyeing the limp mouse and the strangely coloured snake. *"An interesting patterning as well."*

Lutain peered down at his body, observing the alteration in his colour. From dark black, almost bluish, he had somehow changed in just a series of days to speckled yellow and brown.

"Summer." Lutain offered, twisting and dancing in a signature S to appear more majestic. *"It is warm, and summer now."*

"Your scales alter with the seasons? Perhaps a lasting warming charm would appeal to you."

Adrian didn't know how to cast a lasting warming charm. He didn't want Lutain to indulge in a spell that he hadn't cast.

Lutain hissed wordlessly, rising as high as he could without falling to the floor. It was an impressive height, just shy of his father's naval.

"Make scales dark?" Lutain hissed curiously, twisting in a cobra-esq dance. *"Make strong?"*

"Lutain," Adrian choked out, reaching to snatch the dangerous snake away and back onto the bed. Lutain squirmed in Adrian's frantic grasp.

His father watched him with a blank expression. His mouth was twitching into a slight frown, Adrian had no hope for understanding the expression.

"No?" Nagini asked, lifting her body up and resting her head on Adrian's bed once again, *"Master make you fast."*

"He's fast enough," Adrian snapped out, swallowing once he realized his insolent outburst.

Nagini opened her mouth for protest, only for Voldemort to stroke down her large head, *"Silence, my dear. The spell is quite difficult, otherwise I would long ago have taught young Adrian it. I don't believe he possesses the innate ability for such magic, even if he had years to practice."*

The words were ambiguous and bordering the line of praise and insult. Adrian felt almost like keening pathetically, fighting the urge to try and show him wrong.

He *could,* he could practice and he *could* do that magic, easily!

And yet, he mused on if his father intended for him to give in so easily. Why else would he have phrased it such as that, if not for Adrian to beg him to teach him anyways?

This wasn't about him though, it was about Lutain. He couldn't throw his familiar in the same danger he faced every day. He *wouldn't.*

It wasn't that he didn't trust his father, the man had done a remarkable job of tending to his wounds and making sure that he was always alright. He just suspected that everything was beyond his control- everything was orchestrated and practiced and no matter what Adrian did he couldn't *escape.*

By saying no...this was his *chance,* this was *his* choice and not his father's.

He didn't want to disappoint his father. He didn't want to hurt Lutain.

He almost felt like crying as suddenly everything was *too much,* noises were too loud and his ears rang loudly and he felt the tickling urge of hysterical giggles press on his chest anxiously.

"Master?" Lutain looked up, wriggling eagerly.

"Let us not pressure your young master." His father spoke slowly, the red eyes observing him in such a way Adrian *knew* he could see the impact of his words.

Adrian tucked his hands below his thighs and out of sight to disguise the way they shook ever so slightly.

"And let us not be hasty, Lutain. The change is quite permanent, and I would not proceed without your young master's permission."

The red eyes slyly met Adrian's own, "After all, Lutain *is* your familiar."

Adrian said nothing, mostly because he was not sure how his voice would remain steady. He couldn't *think.*

His father rolled his eyes, Adrian's eyes prickled as he felt the stifling weight of disappointing his father lay heavy on his shoulders.

"I found Nagini in a pet store, located in Hogsmeade," His father started, his tone affectionate as he gently ran his fingers over the ridges around Nagini's eyes, "The store has long since closed. She was quite young at the time, and the staff obviously didn't know her species."

Adrian leaned forward subconsciously, watching his father's face with the utmost concentration. The way he spoke was so gentle, so proud and fond. Adrian hoped that someday he would talk about Adrian that way.

"I purchased her for two galleons." his father continued. "I had to sneak her back into the castle, of course. I kept her beneath my bed with a warming charm, as at the time I had to be very careful. The Chamber of Secrets had just been opened-"

"Why didn't you return my letter?" Adrian blurted, twitching as his father looked at him questionably, "The letter I sent, about the chamber."

"My *useless* follower, *Wormtail,* destroyed the letter prior to me receiving it, something about it being *hexed."*

Adrian had heard that name before, he knew who that was. He was the man who was an animagus, the one who knew the Potters before everything had happened.

His father wasn't happy with the man; Adrian could imagine how his flesh would have been slowly cut away in ornate ribbons and spiraling twirls- like the peeling of an apple.

(Adrian had only seen it once, watching his leg unravel towards his knee like a Christmas decoration, feeling his wand shaking in his hand and bile rising up the back of his throat. It was only a second before his father spoke the countercurse. His muscle looked wet and purple in the chandelier light.)

"Nagini is very important to me." Voldemort continued, speaking in soothing tones Adrian had never imagined the man capable of. "She holds a piece of my soul."

Adrian blinked at the odd expression. He hadn't ever heard of it, although it did convey affection appropriately.

"As do you," his father finished, turning and locking his eyes to Adrian's wide ones

His father stood and left his room, walking with footsteps too poised for how startled Adrian felt.

He was...*important?*

He knew that he was- what other logical reason was there for his treatment and care? Adrian still felt the doubt, irrationally gnawing anxiously inside- *was* he important?

His father didn't speak to him in those soothing tones, he didn't trail a finger along his jaw affectionately as he did to Nagini. He pushed him and twirled him, cursing him and praising him and it gave Adrian the sick idea that he was simply a marionette dancing on strings.

He choked on how *badly* he wanted to be the best marionette his father had, he wanted to make him *so happy.*

Adrian didn't know how, and he was beginning to doubt he ever would.

"What type is she?" Adrian asked quietly, sitting curled in a couch while Lutain and Nagini reared playfully on the carpet- each rising into mesmerizing dances and learning what the other could perform. Nagini had the benefit of height and girth, able to tense and move the muscles along her throat and belly until her entire body was undulating while her head remained still.

Lutain in contrast was thin and fast. He reared to a less impressive height, yet could dance with cobra grace into an almost hypnotic rhythm.

Adrian's father looked up, peering over his desk at the two serpents.

"I'm not sure; she was advertised as a reticulated python, although it's more likely that the owner didn't know either."

Adrian tilted his head and observed her body, "She's a python for sure. She has the heat pits and the other trademarks."

His father gave a small hum of agreement as he quickly finished whatever paperwork he had been writing. He set the quill down in its holder and crossed his arms on his desk.

"She didn't always appear the way she does now," his father explained slowly, in a tantalizing way he did when he was telling Adrian something he should remember.

"She's been enchanted and enhanced. I...boosted her potential, gave her abilities others would never have."

Adrian couldn't imagine what else he could have done to a python. She was obviously more intelligent, perhaps he aided her in serpent abilities?

"Did you give her venom?" Adrian asked, peering at Nagini who was now flicking her tail stiffly in attempts to mimic Lutain's whiptail.

"Partially," His father hummed, avoiding the question and leaving the answer tantalizingly out of reach, "I imbued her with magic. Her body strengthened and enchanted itself and she developed the venom herself."

It made sense. Adrian couldn't imagine any store selling an animal as lethal as Nagini; if her lethality came only after she was purchased it would certainly explain why she was so difficult to determine what species she was.

"Can she breed?" Adrian asked curiously, trying to imagine how interesting it would be if such enchantments carried through to her children.

Adrian's father looked baffled, his eyebrows rising ever so slightly and his eyes widening in confusion.

"Nagini has no interest in coupling nor will she ever." His father scoffed, as if the concept was well below him and her alike.

Adrian felt as if he should argue. He didn't want to, most likely because his father sounded so sure of himself. He wondered if the enhancement he was talking about was what he had offered Lutain.

"And Lutain?" His father asked, watching the thin brown snake coil himself and flash his fangs affectionately, "No muggle store would possess such a creature, and yet he seems too exotic to be found in the wild."

Adrian smiled at his familiar, "He wasn't. I didn't buy him. I stole him, really. Accidental magic,"

Adrian heard his tone soften in affection to his serpent. "He wanted freedom."

"You stole him?"

"From a zoo," Adrian offered, almost laughing at the surprised expression on his father's face, "He wanted to leave so I took him. He was much smaller, probably only a few months a muggle species, no magic in him."

His father eyed Lutain considerably, "I have not encountered such a snake before. It is remarkable that he is as formidable as he is, without the aid of magic."

Adrian felt the glow of pride bubble inside him happily. He had to hold himself back from beaming.

Lutain peered back at the two of them, his face and skull shaped into a permanent glare.

"Very," Lutain paused, considering before slowly hissing out, "For-mid-able."

"Formidable," Adrian offered again, Lutain flicking his tongue as he corrected himself and returned to playing with Nagini.

"You're patient with him." His father noted, his tone just shy of something... new. "You haven't enhanced his mental capabilities with magic at all."

It wasn't a question, simply an observation. Adrian didn't know if he was impressed or disappointed.

"No," Adrian admitted, twisting his fingers nervously, "He... I hadn't known any spells or enchantments then. I wanted to teach him English, he's a good friend."

Voldemort nodded slowly, blinking lazily like a content crocodile. "A testament to your patience. It seems ironic that you're capable of teaching a serpent to comprehend English without spellwork, and yet you're unable to master a rudimentary shielding charm."

Adrian paused and swallowed hoarsely. It didn't help move the lump in his throat from wiggling down into his stomach. Oh Merlin, Adrian felt so mediocre...

"Then again," His father started, pausing dramatically as tensions once again rose higher, "You would not believe who cannot perform that spell. Only a fraction of my Death Eaters can cast it adequately." Voldemort huffed, somehow keeping his tone light and only minorly intimidating.

Adrian wasn't sure if he was expected to laugh or balk at the expectations set for him.

"Hatch day!" Nagini suddenly interjected, hissing with an urgency trademarked by spontaneous recollection, "Master! Hatch day!"

Voldemort caught her head as his familiar collapsed in his lap heavily. Nagini tensed and twitched, her scales expanding before contracting in movement of her muscles coiling under her skin.

"Ah yes, thank you, my dear." Voldemort crooned, assuring Nagini of a job well done, "I nearly forgot. Your birth date is approaching rapidly, isn't it?"

Adrian nearly balked, "I- yes," How was this conversation supposed to end?

Voldemort hummed a monotone which conveyed no emotion or desire to continue the conversation.

Adrian wondered morbidly what Bellatrix would have gotten him for his birthday.

Adrian's birthday was a lethargic instance of how doing absolutely nothing was wonderful.

His father lived on the belief that a day where nothing was accomplished was a poor excuse of a day itself. Adrian was held with the expectation of accomplishing something before bed everyday.

It was exhausting, yet rewarding to track his exponential knew that by the quickly approaching school year, Adrian would be miles ahead of his classmates.

The rigorous schedule was broken by the heavy weight of Nagini crushing him to the charmed mattress under a loud mantra of 'Hatch day! Hatch day!'

Adrian didn't understand how a python with a poor grasp on human behaviour was so excited for a birthday, but Nagini's mood was infectious, her loud feminine cries lured Lutain into repeating the mantra with the sparse storytelling of Adrian's prior birthdays.

Adrian padded down the stairs and into the kitchen of the large estate dressed solely in his sleeping clothing. His slightly too long trousers dragged on the floor and collected dust in a way he knew his father would hate. It was comfy, so that was all Adrian had to say.

"Master!" Lutain cheered, slithering his way up onto the counter from a haphazard collection of empty boxes Adrian had stacked just for his friend. Lutain yawned largely, his scaled lips flapping in a way which never ceased to make Adrian smile, "Gifts? Gifts for the hatch-day?"

"Probably," Adrian blinked, fishing around for an apple, "although considering Bellatrix isn't here, I may not actually get anything. Don't worry, you'll still get to lounge around."

Lutain yawned again, showing off his brightly yellow belly and his strangely sandy brown scales.

Adrian didn't have any training or spellwork. He didn't have anything extra to read or assignments to complete. Best yet, he didn't need to do anything.

Which is how his father found him buried deep into a book about the magical animal species of southern Africa, nursing a cup of warm butterbeer and wearing two mismatched socks. The best part was that Adrian was sitting sideways on the chair, wearing the ratty sleeping garments he knew his father hated, still coated with the fine crumbs of messy breakfast pastries.

Voldemort's nose wrinkled in distaste the moment he laid eyes on Adrian's posture and appearance, "I'm not sure what I am most aghast by."

Adrian peered up over the book, blinking silently and waiting for the hailstorm to begin.

His father opened his mouth, poised for the verbal thrashing, before his jaw closed with a click. The red eyes conveyed all the disgust needed, although it was amazingly reigned in.

"Come along," Voldemort grunted, losing his image of a father-figure with how his shoulders slumped in annoyance, "Nagini is excited to see you open your gifts."

He had gifts?

This was beginning to be one of the most surreal experiences in Adrian's life.

He did have gifts. Stacked in tiny piles in one of the rooms nearest to to where the post delivered. All of the packages likely had been delivered and thoroughly checked by the wards. He spotted the trademark embossed silver wrapping paper from the Malfoys, something reddish brown signed by Theodore Nott. Boxes from Pansy and shockingly enough, Hermione nestled themselves around other boxes and packages.

Draco sent him books, as well as Hermione and Pansy. It appeared books were the best default present for him. Theodore Nott tried a step further, gifting him an elaborate set of ink sticks used to create custom coloured inks of varying viscosities.

At that point, all of the gifts became better.

He had been gifted a larger cage for Lutain, nearing the size of a full sized trunk with realistic canyon walls and sandy plants growing in the substrate. It would be perfect to display his friend in his dorm room, while also granting the illusion of control. He was gifted a collection of books as well, a designer set each autographed by Newton Artemis Fido Scamander back in the early 1900's. A few even had hand drawn illustrations in the margin- ink smeared on the cover with handwritten note to a Lestrange.

The real golden snitch of Adrian's gifts, was the single crystal vial with a Animagus Transformation potion inside of it.

"I hope you know how to use that," His father sniffed, eyeing the contents with a bored expression, "In the rare occasion it is something useful, you are permitted to practice the transformation."

Adrian had the Animagus Transformation potion, he had it and he hadn't needed to even buy it.

For a split second, Adrian forgot completely that his father was Lord Voldemort.

He could hear the distant childhood laughs and cries of a birthday party, the late summer sun warm his skin as children played quidditch and he sat on the porch. He could almost taste the sweet lemonade and feel the stifling heat vanish with the slightest breeze.

This time it was his party, it was his.

He couldn't remember James Potter in his childhood memory. He remembered someone walking to the porch, seating themselves beside him and talking with a gentle lilting voice as the breeze once more rose and stirred the air.

Red eyes looked downwards curiously and a slightly amused smirk tilted lips as Adrian leant against his father with the muffled imagination of what it should have been.

Lutain jolted in surprise when Adrian nearly threw the boxes from his lap. He clutched the crystal vial in his left hand tightly as he jumped the small gap and wrapped his small arms around the waist and black coat of the imposing figure that had suddenly changed his world.

Voldemort was hit with a metaphorical freezing hex.

It was the best birthday Adrian ever had.

In some countries the age of thirteen was the age of adulthood in the magical world. It was obviously the age where his father assumed Adrian could start proving his worth.

It was ridiculous to send Adrian out on the field of battle with such inexperience. Adrian had abilities and skills most of his Death Eaters didn't- the pure fascination and desire to learn about magical creatures. He wasn't an experienced dueler; if he believed the scathing insults, then he was mediocre at best, with no imagination during a fight. He relied too much on a flimsy base ability for accidental magic, which was pathetic at best.

Adrian did know various species of merfolk, which also was pathetic. His father mused on sending Adrian out on a peace relation with various creature species in the future, although the prospect of meeting and trying to intimidate a vampire seemed horrifying.

If that's what his future was, then Adrian was going to try his best at that. He jumped into learning

as much as he could from the various books he had received from Bellatrix a while back, reading and struggling to memorize all of the information he could on werewolves, vampires, giants, and any creature he likely would encounter.

The more Adrian read about Dementors and other wraith-like creatures, the more he felt something stirring deep within him.

His father had explicitly told him before that he shouldn't concern himself with Dementors. He assumed that it was because there were plenty of people locked within the depths of Azkaban, it was unrealistic for Adrian to focus his attention on something that was impossible to penetrate.

Adrian also suspected that his father didn't want him to think of Bellatrix. He had heard stories that those who went to Azkaban, no matter how long, never came back the same. All because of Dementors.

He wanted to know more, how did these shadowy beings live? How did they function? How were they so mysterious but imbued with such power?

He wanted to know everything.

(And from there he was gone.)

Shiver

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian see's a dementor, meets a weird girl, and vomits quite a bit.

Chapter Notes

This chapter was beta'd by my group of helpers including the following:
-Arctic Fox From Afar
-Mahina
-Cyndaquil05

This chapter also has a borderline mental breakdown and may be difficult for some readers.

Adrian packed the Animagus Transformation potion in his trunk with all of his things; as well as Lutain's new home and his near bookshelf worth of tomes. Even trying to push and arrange Nagini's considerable weight on the top lid only compressed the pile slightly. He unhappily had to restack and remove several of his books from his collection simply to fasten the lock shut.

On September first the Hogwarts Express left promptly, and it wouldn't do to show up late or early enough to be noticed.

Normally lucky to find an empty compartment, it seemed that no matter where he looked Adrian was forced to exchange pleasantries with younger students or the occasional annoying upper year. His reputation was working against him, after the fiasco of the Chamber of Secrets people started to view him as the more shady salesman of Hogwarts. On multiple occasions in the short trek through the cabins, he was forced to awkwardly inform equally awkward students that *no,* he didn't have anything on him for the trip.

One student even gasped embarrassingly loud before yanking her friend out of his way. She blushed embarrassed yet still eyed him warily. Merlin's beard, did she think he was suddenly going to throw a cursed mummified rat at her?

The idea behind such an unwarranted stigma caused him to hotly shove past, none to gently, knocking his bony shoulder into her side. He heard her gasp loudly again and murmur to her friend as he practically stomped down the hall.

He hadn't *done anything,* it was absolutely asinine for anyone to treat him like that.

He slid into a compartment with a strange looking younger year student, wearing dark robes with a silvery blue scarf which complemented her surreal eyes. She was reading a book upside down, seemingly enraptured in it, although it must have been entirely illegible.

Adrian stewed and slid down slightly in his seat, saliva pooling in his mouth as he bit his tongue

waiting for her offensive question or action.

She didn't look up, she simply turned a page of her upside down book.

The train ran over a bridge, the repetitive sound of wheels turning changed pitch and light flickered in the window.

"That's a nice snake you have," The girl spoke, her voice feathery soft and her eyes half-lidded as if she had just woken up, "He seems nice."

Something about her face reminded Adrian of a newly hatched snake, eyes clouded and unfocused with the sudden exposure to air. No, somehow the incoherent hatchling didn't fit her. She seemed more haunting, a dream-like creature such as a Nocnitsa; drifting in and out of awareness with a state of relaxed lethargy.

Adrian stared at her with no regard to politeness. Who *was* she?

"Excuse me?" he asked abruptly, long past the point where a comment didn't seem awkward.

She didn't look like she noticed the time that elapsed.

"Your snake," She blinked widely, tilting her head and sending mosquito-earrings twisting gently. At least, they looked a little like mosquitos. If mosquitos normally had three wings and a stinger. "He must be a gentleman."

Adrian had no idea what to say in response.

"It's a shame with last year," She continued, confirming that she wasn't a first year, "Now people look at you like you have Bowtruckles for hair."

"Well I hope I don't," Adrian blinked, still completely baffled. At least she made a little more sense than Bellatrix. A little. "That would be a disaster."

"Yes, it would," She tilted her head with a knowing smile and the disconcerting silvery eyes. "Your hair is more blue. Like a Korruu."

"A *korruu?"*

"Yes. They're like giant wolves with antlers. But they have black hair and eat femur bones. It's a shame that they're being pushed out of Bulgaria- "

"I know what a Korruu is," Adrian stumbled to try and save the conversation, "There's a preservation in Hungary for them. I heard the American breed is doing well."

"Oh wonderful, I wondered if they were doing alright with the Thunderbirds and the Naki war. Silly things, Naki, they think that every storm is because of a Thunderbird. Naki just want to eat tree roots in peace, but it's hard to when the tornados keep coming around. At least they don't have any Hankypuffs fighting with them either." She smiled, beaming with strange eyes like they were filled with stardust.

What? What was, what *was* this girl? Some sort of Sylph? No, the sylph were much more elusive and other species of human or human like creatures weren't accepted into Hogwarts. Perhaps she was some sort of seer? A seer wouldn't explain her befuddling personality.

Then she looked back at her upside down book and ignored him for the rest of the ride.

Of course.

Just over halfway, the train skittered to a screeching stop. Lutain awoke in a fury of aggression at being jolted around in his comfy nook in Adrian's front pocket. As he cupped one hand around his chest, he could hear the muffled shouts and complaints from other students and classmates as the train teetered to an unfortunate stop.

"What's going on?" Adrian mumbled under his breath, asking his familiar more than anyone else.

"The train has stopped," The girl blinked, jolting him and reminding him that he wasn't quite alone, "I dearly hope it's not from a Boobrie."

Adrian shot her a look. "This far from a loch? Probably not, a Glaistig or a Cu Sith seems more likely..."

She smiled knowingly and looked out the window right as the sky became black. Her smile faltered, twisting her expression into something concerned.

"Master," Lutain hissed, tucking his snout under Adrian's jaw, *"Master, I smell rotting death."*

Adrian's hairs slowly stood on end on his arms and the back of his neck. He almost smelled the sickening aroma that a few of Bellatrix's spells gave off, brushing just along his jaw.

Clouds covered the sun from what the window of his compartment could show. The window on the door to the hallway flickered eerily, making Luna's skin look slightly green.

He heard a muffled voice cast *lumos*, echoed by other students; fireflies illuminating through the glass like pixies.

Adrian exhaled and saw his own breath just as his bones began to ache in his skin.

"Oh," The girl exhaled, her own breath a fine cloud of cold. Adrian followed her eyesight, seeing something fluttering and black flash past his window.

What was going *on?*

It was too much Bellatrix's style, her taste in dramatics. But Bellatrix was in *Azkaban,* this...this couldn't have been her work.

Perhaps his father, oh Merlin, was his *father* making a move?

Wouldn't he have *told him?*

There was another trail of black, barely visible in the gloom that had shrouded the window in darkness. Black trailing strands, like ribbons dancing over the glass.

At once he knew what it was, and he felt the rising swell of excitement in the face of danger.

"Dementors," He breathed, stumbling to his feet to swing open the door to the hallways, "They must be on the train for something…"

He *had* to see them, he had learned so much about them behind his father's back. His father had told him to not interest himself in the guardian's of Azkaban, that he wouldn't find use there.

But Dementor's were on the *train,* he *knew* that the book would be useful.

(He mentally groaned as he remembered where he had left the book, hidden in his room under his bed. It was one of the first books to be removed from his trunk when Nagini convinced him that no matter how hard she squeezed, the lock wouldn't close.

The darkness receded and the temperature rose before he could open the door to see the shadowy figures just out of eyesight.

"The Minister should have better control over them." A glance at the girl showed she was as pale and shaken as a real sylph after being so close to them. "They shouldn't be on the train."

"Don't you wish you saw one?" Adrian asked in puzzlement, this girl knew magical creatures and seemed enthusiastic over them. Surely she hungered to see the creatures that stood in the Veil between death and life too?

"No," Her voice was sharp and her eyes lost the dreamy qualities. "Creatures that are more shade than living are not for those on this train, Shadis."

For speaking of Thunderbirds before, she seemed to embody the firm boldness of the creatures.

Adrian flinched unwillingly at the firm nearly sizzling bite to her tone.

"What? What did you just call me?"

She gained the dreamy quality once again, "Selwyn, of course. A wonderful name, it almost sounds like selkie." She paused, looking pensive, "Do you think there could be selkies in the Black Lake?"

Shadis, she had clearly called him Shadis.

Adrian didn't know why that name had hit him somehow harder in his chest than the Dementor's presence had, but it couldn't be good.

Everyone was still complaining about the Dementors by the time they had reached the Hogwarts station.

The first years were split apart to ride the boats across the Black Lake in the impressive first glance at the castle. The other students waited patiently for the Thestral-drawn carriages to transfer a half dozen students at a time.

Luna eyed him boldly, not looking away even as he caught her rudeness. She was observant, much more than he had given her credit for. He knew that she had seen his accidental flinch.

She turned in the crowd, walking with the masses away and out of sight.

Despite seeing her walk pointedly out of his sight, she somehow gave the impression of fading away into the dark, swallowed up into the night.

Adrian didn't bother chasing her.

Instead Draco approached and slung one arm around his waist, careful to not bother Lutain who curled around Adrian's throat.

"Ah," Draco grimaced, "Still have that thing with you?"

"You smell like canary." Lutain hissed casually, as if discussing the weather.

"Can't get rid of Lutain that easily," Adrian smoothly stated, peering up at the Thestrals who paid no mind to him, "Did you find the others?"

"Crabbe and Goyle rode with Pansy in the last carriage. Theo, Blaise, and Daphne are waiting for us." Draco assured, turning and taking the lead towards a more weathered Thestral in particular. Theo was awkwardly avoiding looking at the creature in question.

"There you are!" Daphne sighed, brushing her hands on the green overcoat she was wearing, "Were you on the train with the Dementor?"

"No, fortunately." Adrian lied smoothly, and continued with "A pleasure to see you again, Daphne."

"Bad luck, that." Theo started, fidgeting to not look at the thestral. "Figures if anyone would see that thing, it would be you."

Adrian felt a flash of annoyance through him, burning slowly at his fingertips. He had grown so used to the respect and strange balance he and his father had, the blatant disrespect irked him in a way it never had before.

"Bad luck, right." Adrian spoke sharply, glancing at Theo coldly and irritated, "Best I not let all that out then."

Theo's face twitched in surprise at how sharp the comment was. He didn't say anything further.

"Master, can we go?" Lutain hissed, flexing against his throat, *"It is cold and wet."*

The thestral snorted and shook its head, as if laughing.

Theo jumped noticeably, skittering once he landed like a fawn on ice. He flushed uncomfortably, trying to skirt away from the Thestral with how anxious he looked in its presence.

What a ridiculous thing, Adrian almost felt like glaring at him.

Thestrals were gorgeous, strong yet wiry with every bone on display like an anatomy textbook.

He tried to not let it bother him how Theo cringed away from such beautiful beasts, they deserved more respect and admiration. Adrian would love to gaze upon them if he had time.

"Let's hurry on, I'm *dying* for the feast." Draco drawled, "Honestly, those pathetic pastries the trolley passes off as-"

Adrian quickly ignored the dull chatter of the others as he took his place nearest the window.

The carriage rolled towards the castle into the unloading area where the Prefects and house ghosts were cheerfully moving the students along into the grand hall to find their spots under the proper tables and banners.

"Draco!" Pansy shrieked, having saved a spot for him right next to her, how amusing the sight was. Draco winced but resigned to sit next to her, Adrian sat across in a spot not as good for viewing the new first years.

"Ah, still have that thing?" Pansy asked, her smile strained as she spotted Lutain uncoil from Adrian's neck to sit on his golden plate.

Lutain puffed out air annoyed, his tail tip flickering lazily to show his disinterest and offence.

"You can't keep the snake away, can you?" Blaise grumbled, seating himself stiff and dignified and ignoring the glances from two second year girls whispering and giggling to each other.

Finally the tables were filled, proportionally quieter compared to the year before. Most likely due to the somber quiet Weasley twins who looked more sickly than happy.

Adrian physically jolted when he realized why.

Ginny.

"What's wrong, it looks as if you've seen a ghost." Daphne remarked, reaching for a goblet filled with water.

"I'm fine." Adrian croaked back, trying to compose himself quickly.

He hadn't even thought of Ginny in the summer months.

He had left a girl to starve to death, wandless, alone, and scared, miles below the school, and *forgotten* about it.

He had *murdered* her-

'But was it murder?' A voice prompted him, soothing away his horror, *'You were only a bystander. You didn't kill her, after all, starvation did.'*

That was true, but -

He chose to do nothing.

Nothing.

Was choosing to not intervene in certain death the same as killing her himself? And what did it matter? His father would have had her killed without question, she'd seen and heard too much. If anything, he'd given her a kinder death than his father would have.

He thought of hunger, and darkness, and fear - *please let me out I promise I'll be good mom, dad, where are you!* - and wondered when those things had become a *kindness.*

He couldn't think about that now. He *couldn't.*

He hadn't thought about that in a long time. He couldn't lose it now.

The large doors to the main corridor swung open, being led by Professor McGonagall with a large pointy hat. The first years all looked a mixture of terrified and amazed by the thousands of floating candles and enchanted ceiling.

"Hey," A slytherin slid down the table, one of Pansy and Daphne's friends, if Adrian remembered correctly. "You hear Potter fainted?"

Draco's neck snapped around in surprise as his jaw dropped.

"What? *Tell us!"* Pansy shrieked in a whisper like a baby banshee, looking enraptured in the story already.

"Yeah!" The girl giggled, a noise more dignified on Millicent. "Somethin' bout the Demen-tor stalkin' him! He was at front o' the train so it got 'im and 'e fainted! Shrieked somethin' and passed

ou' righ' there!"

Draco looked positively gleeful

Something twisted warmly in Adrian's chest. Skylar had *fainted,* hell, he could wager that Skylar didn't know a *single thing* about Dementors.

He wanted to search out the other boy and laugh at his face.

The first names were called and the students walked across the stretch to get to the sorting hat.

"But tha's no' the bes' par'!" The girl continued, leaning inwards with a whisper."They said 'e shouted ou' a name o' some guy-"

"Potter's a *poofer?"* Draco gasped, eyes growing wide in surprise.

"Nah, nah!" The girl hushed, eyes gleaming with excitement. "Be'er!"

They were on the C's now for students.

"Better than that? I doubt it." Draco sniffed, losing interest already. "Isn't that right, Selwyn?"

Onto the D's.

"I get better information from the Hufflepuffs." Adrian baited, watching the girl scowl and rise to prove them wrong.

"Fine! Bu' hear this," She grinned at each face, waited, then dropped. "Shou'ed somethin' abou' a *brother."*

Adrian's heart jolted.

In the shocked silence of the table, the name of the next student rang loud and clear in the quiet of the Great Hall.

"Forestar, Suzan!"

Adrian's heart *stopped.*

A girl in pigtails- *her face was unmistakable*, sprang across the ground looking excited and nervous all the same. The hat fell over her head, contemplated a while before shouting loudly to the expectant hall, "Slytherin!"

Adrian's life was falling apart.

It was her.

It was *her.*

How? *How?* Adrian thought she was dead- she *should* have died in the fire. There was *no way* that she could be alive, not to mention *here.*

Suzie was younger than Adrian, but she hadn't *ever* expressed accidental magic. If she did she could have stopped him from pushing her down the flights of stairs, she could have stopped him from destroying her bear, she should have stopped him from-

David's cold empty eyes stared at him. His corpse had stiffened and glowed orange in reflection to the fire-

Adrian clutched his head harder and tried to keep from curling into a ball.

His father...his father could help. Yes, his father *would* help, because he was important to his father.

But was he really? Perhaps his father would scoff and find it a nuisance.

No, *no,* no he *had* to think that his father would help him.

Unless he had to deal with her alone.

Against his will, a flash of red hair and pale skin filled his mind.

He shook his head violently, hair whipping his face at the near manic movement. Draco coughed around his roll, eyeing Adrian as if he was possessed.

Oh Merlin, what if his father wanted him to *kill her.*

Oh god no, no he *can't* do *that…*

He felt bile twist and surge against his throat, stinging his chest painful enough tears welled in his eyes. He forced it down, gagging on the acrid taste as his knuckles curled and he struggled to ease his breathing.

In through his mouth, out through his nose.

The air stung his nostrils.

This? Was a *disaster.*

The rooms for the Slytherin students were finally moved upstairs. Theo had *graciously* agreed to be Adrian's roommate this year. He'd even already moved everything onto his one side, decorating the walls with earthy tones after a simple spell. Adrian had waited until the other boy left before he locked the door.

He managed to unpacked one chest before he crumpled to his knees.

It was Suzie, it *was* her. He could recognize her face and her voice anywhere, even as it was older. She still had those ridiculous pigtails, although she had filled out much more. Had she been adopted? Was David a squib?

Suzie had seen Adrian speak *parseltongue-*

If Suzie exposed Adrian, then the only student who could possibly be the heir to Slytherin would be *him*. They could threaten him with expulsion, they could take Lutain away from him in an attempt of a threat. Worse yet, it would give the headmaster a reason to finally start to look at Adrian, to *really* look at him. It was suspicious how similar Adrian already looked like to his father, he knew that Professor McGonagall was uncomfortable but had dismissed it.

But Suzie could ruin *everything.*

Not only that, but now a rumor spreading around that Skylar Potter had a *brother?*

"This is bad," Adrian choked out, clutching his head in a panic-induced mess. "Lutain, this is *bad."*

"I can bite!" Lutain offered, even as he was shivering with equal levels of anxiety. *"Get rid of girl-"*

"No no, they have tracking spells, analyzing spells, they'll trace it back to you and me both." Adrian gulped, pausing before his eyes widened even further, "Lutain, she's seen you before. She's *seen you before."*

Adrian crumpled, bracing his forearm against his bed as his stomach twisted and he gurgled pitifully. His jaw jolted open to near serpentine proportions as he gagged, nearly retching out the dinner he had just consumed.

Adrian Selwyn was, utterly and entirely, screwed.

When Adrian entered the Great Hall for breakfast the next day, the first thing he saw was Draco Malfoy entertaining a large group of Slytherins with a story. As Adrian walked closer, he could see Draco imitate a swooning fit to cause a roar of laughter.

"Hey! Potter!" Adrian flinched before realizing Pansy's cry was directed over his shoulder.

Skylar Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger all scowled at Pansy.

"Potter! The dementors are coming, Potter! Wooo!" Draco imitated, once more drawing laughter from the crowd.

Adrian instead walked to the table to receive his schedule for his classes. He pulled off an excellent job ignoring everyone, although it may have been from how terrible he looked. Dark bags hung from his eyes, his normally pristine hair was in disarray and he found himself jumping at all sounds.

"You okay there?" Theo asked, sliding closer to lower his voice under the level anyone else would be able to hear."You didn't sleep last night-"

"I'm fine." Adrian snapped, snatching his schedule before quickly reading it over. Hagrid was the new Care of Magical Creature's teacher? He must have missed it being announced the night before.

His schedule was custom-fitted to accommodate his strange request for Care, along with Runes and not Arithmancy or Divination. This meant that his first class would be the following day, generally the first day was a free day to walk your schedules and to find all of your classes before you were on a time constraint.

Adrian had something better to do.

There was an Animagus Transformation Potion he needed to take.

The Chamber of Secrets didn't smell, that was the first warning.

It looked identical to how Adrian and Riddle had left it. The massive snakeskin was still there, shifted to one side but still in perfect condition. It just emphasized the oddity of having a complete skeleton nestled nearest the clawed up bits of skin.

For some reason, seeing a skeleton was easier than seeing a corpse.

"I thought bodies took longer to rot." Adrian spoke, feeling as if he was hearing the words spoken by another person.

"It is wet and air," Lutain offered, uncoiling and sliding down to finally stretch and slither off into the darkness of the chamber.

No- in the tomb.

It was now a tomb.

Adrian approached the corpse, trying not to heave at the sight of the hair, dampened by grime and wet and rot, but still fiery red, and the pristine teeth still stuck by the roots.

The snake skin had suspicious marks on it, like rodents had been gnawing at it, or something, something else-

Adrian turned and vomited violently on the floor. His breakfast was expelled in an acidic slosh of juices and half digested pastries.

"Master?" Lutain slithered over alarmed, *"Is threat near? No smell, do you?"*

"Lutain what-" Adrian choked off at another dry heave as his stomach gurgled angrily. "What are you *talking* about?"

Lutain seemed confused, but even he could recognize that vomiting was a bad sign.

Adrian couldn't look at Gi- at the corpse. The *corpse.* He couldn't even think of how she probably was so tired, so *exhausted* to even try to eat the remains of a Basilisk's shed skin for food.

No. No. no, no, *no, no…*

He heaved with a contracting wave of pain, his stomach cramping against the movement. Stumbling onwards, he hurried into the main chamber to try and get away from the stench of bile and the sight of red hair.

His legs shook, threatening to pitch him onto the slimey ground. He nearly fell, already twisting his body in the pathetic movements to *crawl away.*

Adalonda was sleeping, as Adrian requested. He would awaken her but for now...

He needed something to block it out. He *needed* to forget.

No, no, no, no

He could see her staring at him. Lying prone and limp with lips painted in blood.

How she would lift herself up on bruised forearms, reaching out to trace his jaw gently with fingertips tinged in gore.

"You killed me," She whispered, and the soft fingertips suddenly felt like dull bone.

He sunk to his knees, the sound clicking loudly in the large dimly lit chamber. He hunkered and heaved, wet sounds from his tongue as he coughed pathetically and greenish bile dripped onto the ground.

"Lumos." He croaked out, lighting his wand as Lutain curled restlessly around where he kneeled.

"Master is this good idea?" Lutain fretted, *"You smelled threat so no food-"*

"No," He coughed, gagging, "It- It's a human thing."

"Oh," Lutain sighed, scenting worriedly, *"I will check for threat."*

Adrian exhaustedly smiled, "Thank you."

The crystal potions vial was cold in his hand, and almost certainly terribly to take, especially on an empty stomach. It grounded him, bringing slight clarity through the vicious trembling of his body.

It couldn't possibly be worse than Bellatrix's curses, and it would keep his mind focused, away from- away.

The potion was only supposed to sink him back into his mind, so far intoxicated that he would barely feel when his magic would wrap his body for the first change. From there he would have to teach his own magic how to trigger it on command. Essentially, he would fall unconscious and he would transform into his animagus form. Trapped so far from his body, pushed back in his mind to where he wouldn't be able to see the skeleton...

He fished for the crystal vial, holding it up in the light his lumos cast. It was slightly golden, nearly transparent, and it didn't smell when he removed the stopper- *very* high quality

"Bottoms up," He muttered with barely any attempt at humor, hoping it wouldn't taste as bad as the bile which still permeated his throat.

It tasted like honeysuckle and ginger.

But it burned like Fiendfyre.

Adrian woke up with his head pounding and his limbs feeling like jello. They tingled with a painful pins and needle sensation, taking several tries to flex and move properly.

"Lutain?" Adrian hissed, blinking in the dark for his companion. He belatedly noticed he was speaking parseltongue.

He found his wand, a short distance away from where he had put it, and lit lumos once again.

"Master?" Lutain quizzically asked, a safe distance and coiled loosely around himself, *"Are you back?"*

"Back?" Adrian asked, rolling his shoulder painfully, "What happened?"

"You are!" Lutain hissed enthusiastically, slithering over tentatively, *"You are of noble kind!"*

"Noble kind?" Adrian echoed with a hoarse snort, "You've been hanging around Nagini too much."

"Never," Lutain retorted. *"A serpent of blackened scale with green eyes."*

Huh. That was... useful.

"How did I know it would be a snake?" Adrian sighed, smile curling at his lips.

The best thing was, if he was a snake, there was *no excuse* why he couldn't travel with his father on raids.

He would be useful. He would find a way.

And he would forget about ginger hair and gasping sobs. He. *Would.*

Boggart

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian faces a Boggart, is generally stressed out, and adopts a cute animal and consequently freaks out

Chapter Notes

This chapter was beta'd by my Beta Collective.
This chapter features the exciting Boggart scene, as well as Adrian royally messing stuff up.
I hope you all enjoy his general anxiety and smol bean syndrome

I've also completed fanart, helping you all understand or at least visualize Adrian.
All fanart is posted to my Tumblr, my username being Digitalta.
Follow the link posted below, or below the comments where it is hyperlinked at the end of this chapter.

http://digitalta.tumblr.com/post/163432069097/finally-got-a-drawing-done

Care for Magical Creatures was an exciting class, especially since Adrian had already established a strange relationship with the now-teacher.

The books required for Care for magical creatures were fascinating. They had teeth, snarled, snapped, and looked less like *books* and more like *creatures*. It growled and tried to eat Adrian's hand first time he picked it up in Diagon alley. He fed the book a few things, and the poor paper monstrosity went surprisingly docile after eating a raw carrot. It seemed that other students were not nearly as lucky with Adrian's discovery; one student was sporting a rather striking set of papercuts all along his forearm.

Draco found the book ridiculous, he struggled to even hold the monstrosity with its impressive added girth of well spun rope. Adrian spotted Skylar Potter scowling at his book, bound with a black belt. At least he had the foresight to bind it shut.

They stumbled over roots and gnarled stumps, a few plants along the trail reached out with thorny barbs to ensnare the students. Adrian and his fellow classmates ignored them easily. Longbottom paused on his trek to pet and coo over one disgruntled stem and leaf.

"These things, are bloody *useless."* Draco growled out, struggling to catch his book as the rope once more slid from his grip.

Adrian glanced down at his own book, contently blinking at the surroundings as its teeth gnashed quietly.

"Figures, Adrian Scamander here manages to tame his," Draco continued, not bothering to see if

Adrian was even paying attention. At this point, it was more Draco scathingly grumbling to himself.

"I fed it a carrot," Adrian offered helpfully, "It enjoyed the crunching."

Draco rolled his eyes and sniffed in annoyance.

Hagrid emerged from his hut, slightly uneasy yet not lacking enthusiasm. Draco joined in vehemently, shouting insults about how impractical the books were. Almost instantly, the large man faltered, looking obviously distressed with himself.

Adrian was mentally bemoaning how disastrous the first class was going. Why couldn't he act like the other professors and simply provide them all a syllabus?

Hagrid of course, wasn't like the other professors.

He left, trying to salvage the first lesson by introducing the students to a disastrous large dangerous creature. It was so unmistakably *Hagrid,* Adrian almost found the action endearing.

He had a large smile as he returned, thick hands grasping hefty rope attached to a leather collar. Once the alpha was led, others followed after like a herd of gentle deer.

But they were *not* deer.

Huge winged horses crossed with lovely birds. Sharp intelligent eagle eyes set in gentle cream and brown feathers sparkling in the sunlight. Some were speckled and painted, mottled grey or entirely arabian with glossy crow feathers.

"Hippogriffs," Adrian found himself mouthing along with Hagrid's loud proclamations of what the amazing creatures were.

"So, he speaks." Draco drawled, and elbowed Adrian. "Finally chose to grace us with your presence?"

Adrian scowled, his complexion much more pale in the sunlight. Adrian wouldn't be surprised if the other students started jokingly teased him with his likliness to a vampire.

"Hey Crabbe, think those things puff up like the owls do?" Draco muttered under his breath, eyes alight with the desire to wreck Hagrid's class.

"Don't," Adrian muttered. "Hippogriffs are vicious. They'll gut you before you even start laughing."

Draco looked startled, as if he hadn't actually thought that they were dangerous, or it hadn't occurred to him anything would attack him.

Hagrid went on to ask for volunteers to get closer to the Hippogriffs, right after enthusiastically describing the dangers of the beautiful - and *vicious* - animals.

"Righ'- who wants ter go first?"

Adrian knew full well if he made eye contact, he wouldn't be able to resist himself from volunteering. Most of the class took a step farther away in answer, even the Potter trio stepped back. The Hippogriffs were tossing their fierce heads and flexing their powerful wings, they didn't seem to like being tethered. Which wasn't too surprising; they were creatures of air and sky,

affiliated with freedom and *new*, and being roped like this was… *rather dangerous*… for everyone involved.

Adrian would have loved to walk forward, to brush his hand and feel the silky difference between fur and pointed feathers. He'd love to gently touch the talons and feel the sharpness of the curved claws.

He couldn't, he *couldn't.* Not because of Hagrid or the Gryffindors, in all honesty he would have the previous year without a thought. The dangers of it be damned, he was fascinated by the Hippogriffs.

But he *couldn't,* because he *knew* Draco would boast about it or prattle on about it behind closed doors in the dungeons. The *last thing* Adrian needed was the first years curiously listening in.

He couldn't risk the attention, especially so soon.

"No one?" Said Hagrid, with a pleading look. You could almost see his shoulders lower like a wounded hound.

Adrian bit his tongue, chewing on it gently to resist the urge to speak up. The class was split with *Gryffindors,* there would be *at least* one student who would be reckless enough to want and see the creatures closer.

"I'll do it."

In hindsight, Adrian should have expected it would be *that* Gryffindor.

'Freaking-'

Only the thought of what his father would say if he finished his sentence kept him from repeating a few *interesting phrases* he'd heard Rabastan use.

"Oooh, no, Skylar, remember your tea leaves!" A female Gryffindor gasped, brushing against Skylar's robes with a wide eyed horrified look.

What the... what did *that* mean?

Skylar ignored them as he climbed over the paddock fence. *What a surprise.*

"Good man, Skylar!" Roared Hagrid. "Right then- let's see how yeh get on with Buckbeak."

Adrian had to choke back the jealousy rising up the back of his throat. Of course it was Skylar that was doing this- why was that *moron* able to meet a Hippogriff up close? *He* was the one to specialize in magical creatures, *he* was the one that *loved* them, blood and bone, heart and soul!

He was the one who deserved it, not that selfish brat who had everything-'

Adrian's fist clenched as he forcefully shut down on the scathing jealousy fueled train of thought.

Adrian's jaw clenched and his teeth bit sharply into his tongue. He tasted the disgusting tang of blood and exhaled sharply through his nose.

He had to remain calm, he had to remain in the background and not draw attention to himself.

It almost physically pained him to do so. Hagrid untied one of the chains, pulling a grey hippogriff away from its fellows and slipping off its leather collar. The class inhaled collectively at the sight.

"Easy now, Skylar," said Hagrid quietly, "Yeh've got eye contact, now try not ter blink...Hippogriffs don' trust yeh if yeh blink too much…"

Buckbeak the hippogriff had turned his great sharp head, and was glaring at Skylar with ferocious eyes.

Skylar bowed.

A heartbeat of breath-held silence, and the hippogriff bowed back.

"Stupid birds," Lutain sniffed, hiding under Adrian's clothing like he always did. *"Smart as pigeon."*

Didn't change the fact that it was Skylar who was getting bowed to.

Then, it managed to get *worse.*

Skylar was prompted onto the back of the mighty creature, then it had the audacity to actually start to fly away. Skylar Potter, was *riding* a *hippogriff.*

That was a once in a lifetime opportunity. One that Adrian *could* have had, if it wasn't for *Suzie.*

Adrian felt frustrated needles prick behind his eyes. His teeth gnashed and once again the tang rose. He felt nauseous.

"It's a stupid bird," Lutain whispered. *"Adalonda would give you a ride."*

Adrian would have smiled at the mental image if he hadn't wanted to start screaming so badly.

Skylar returned looking breathless and overjoyed. From there, everyone carefully climbed over the paddock, cautiously approaching the other creatures and bowing respectively. Adrian stuck close to Draco as the blond haired boy selected Buckbeak.

Draco grew more arrogant the moment the large creature bowed to him. It really wasn't as difficult as they had been led to believe, even though the danger still existed.

"This is very easy," Draco drawled, loud enough for Skylar to hear him. "I *knew* it must have been, if Potter could do it...I bet you're not dangerous at all, are you?"

And of course, saying that was exactly what he *shouldn't* have done.

Draco sauntered forward, Buckbeak's feathers around his neck rose alarmingly as if hackles on a wolf. It's pupils constricted sharply as its neck jerked, face staring intently and beak clicking sharply.

"Don't!" Adrian jolted, pushing Draco out of the way the moment the large creature let out an ungodly wail of half bird-call half horse-knicker. The Hippogriff spread its wings partly, primaries sliding over secondary feathers with a sound like silk. In contrast, It lifted one razor sharp talon, preparing to slash across Adrian's body.

The series of events smoothly transitioned from one to the next, yet together took enough time for Adrian to find himself puzzled over his own actions. *Why* had he moved, jerking forward to shove another student out of the way? It wasn't as if Adrian would get anything out of taking Draco's place...In fact, he *should* have let the boy get struck.

There was a primal instinct, something deep in Adrian's core which simply whispered to him that

he should move. That he should help. Call it humanity, call it his fear for someone who tentatively was his friend- his *first* friend.

If all of Adrian's friends jumped off the covered bridge, Merlin be damned he sure wouldn't. Yet apparently that expression didn't apply to *bloody Hippogriffs.*

This was going to hurt.

"Master!" Lutain gasped, scenting the threat just before it came to fruition.

Buckbeak's eyes locked with Adrian's, and Adrian felt something unfurl, in his raging fear. Borderline hysteria, the unrelenting tide of *oh god, oh god,* that seemed to pulse over his skin.

He couldn't think, but he could feel; almost like he was peeling off a tight layer of clothing.

Buckbeak froze, one claw high in the air poised to strike yet it didn't come. Its eyes shook, alarmed and in shock, widening in panic as the creature seemed to be covered in small treamors.

Adrian couldn't move, his body was straining and his eyes burning and his *blood* was on *fire.*

A second, two seconds...long enough for Adrian to know it was unnatural. Impossible.

"Adrian! I got yeh!"

Hagrids shout ruined it and seemed to snap Buckbeak out of his trance. Adrian felt his body burn, tingling through his skin from the backlash. The creature whirled, flaring his wings and lowering its leg with a mighty swipe. Adrian stumbled backwards trying to avoid, only managing a gash on his left forearm.

Adrian curled inwards instinctively, twitching ever so slightly and gasping audibly as the wound finally registered.

Buckbeak skittered away, snapping angrily and glaring at Draco who looked much too horrified at what had occurred.

"You..." Draco gasped, growing more pale as he noticed blood welling up and trailing down the ruined sleeve of Adrian's robe. Adrian blinked, seeming to snap out of the exhausting haze that was his accidental magic. His absolutely *useless* accidental magic.

"I'm fine!" Adrian snapped, his arm complaining loudly as well as the rest of his limbs from his terrible and exhausting day.

His eyes stung again, an uncomfortable tightness near the back of his throat due to his frustration and helplessness over the situation.

He was supposed to be *nobody!* That was the entire reasoning why he didn't get to *ride* Buckbeak! And now, and now because Draco was so *bloody stupid...*

"Master, are you-" Lutain silenced himself when Adrian stood stiffly and glared. He knew his skin was pale, his eyes bruised and sunken. His limbs shook from the effort of standing after such an event. His heart thumped loudly in his chest and every exhale felt the slightest bit sour.

"I can take yeh to the-" Hagrid cut off as Adrian pointed his wand at his arm and casted a healing spell to close the gash. It stung, itching painfully as the blood clotted and scabbed something ugly. He was thankful he knew this spell after all of the dueling and curses he had experienced.

The class was silent, Skylar looking horrified and taken aback.

Everyone was *looking at him.* He was just...he just wanted to not have attention on *him,* and then *this...*

"Er- class dismissed." Hagrid added, looking quite faint. His large hands fumbled around each other- he looked quite horrified with how the events had progressed.

Adrian felt like crying, he couldn't tell if it was from anger or frustration.

The first Quidditch match was Slytherin vs Gryffindor. Draco didn't shut up about it, boasting about his practice sessions, the state of the uniforms, and the unparalleled speed he could achieve. Adrian spent the time sleeping in his bed, drawing the covers to his chin to try and relax his mind through the stress he had been putting it under. It was almost painful, at times his paranoia and stress over simply attending classes was enough to make him retreat to his room.

The Animagus transformation potion, the upkeep for the occlumency walls, not only that but it seemed that the newest Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher had taken a personal liking in him.

(It was nice in a strange way, he hadn't ever gotten favoritism from anyone except Hagrid, but considering how that lesson went… Then again, Adrian found all of the attention ridiculously *annoying.* He'd take a Hippogriff claw again anyday.)

He was drawing attention from Dumbledore, and it would only be a matter of time before he was interrogated on who his father was. Thank Merlin his name was Selwyn and not Riddle.

The first practical defence class with Professor Lupin, Adrian knew it would be different. The class was not split with other houses, a wise decision because in the earlier years it led to more cross-house attacking then actual learning.

"No books today," Professor Lupin smiled kindly, "Only your wands, today will be practical only."

Daphne exchanged surprised looks with Adrian. Not many teachers would forgo books entirely.

"If you would all follow me," Professor Lupin smiled and guided them out of the classroom and down a deserted corridor into the teacher's staff room.

The massive wardrobe stood out clearly in the otherwise bare space.

"Now then," Professor Lupin started, beckoning for everyone to enter the room. They spread out, clinging to the external walls and as far as possible from the wardrobe, which wobbled suspiciously.

"There is a boggart in there." Lupin announced calmly, almost proudly as he secured the hallway door behind them.

Trapping them. In with a boggart.

Adrian paled and mentally cursed the fact he left Lutain in the dungeons.

"Boggarts like dark, enclosed spaces. Wardrobes, the gap under beds, the cupboards under sinks. This one moved in a few days ago, I asked the headmaster and staff to leave it to give you all some practice. So, the first question we must ask ourselves is, what is a boggart?"

'Don't forget the cupboard under stairs,' Adrian scathingly thought, already setting himself in a

bitter mood.

Eyes of his yearmates instantly fell on Adrian.

'Wonderful.'

"Oh? Seems like you're the one everyone looks to for help." Professor Lupin smiled politely, nodding to the uncomfortable Adrian, "Would you like to give it a shot?"

"Adrian knows every ruddy magical creature" Pansy, *shut your bloody mouth-* "What they look like or how to find it. He's a walking textbook."

Lupin looked similarly alarmed and impressed. He smiled, tilting his head slightly as he leant against a nearby table. He beckoned with one hand politely for Adrian to take the stage.

"It's a shape-shifter." Adrian muttered. "It takes the shape of what the closest person fears the most, or what will incapacitate us best."

"Well done," Lupin confirmed with explanation, gazing over the other students to take notice of the atmosphere. "So the boggart is currently waiting and has not assumed a form. He does not know what will frighten the person on the other side of the door. Nobody knows what a boggart looks like when it is alone, but when I let him out, he will immediately become whatever each of us most fears. This means, that we must use our advantage of numbers."

Pansy looked squeamish.

"The charm that repels a boggart is simple, yet it requires a certain force of mind. You see, the thing that finishes a boggart is laughter. What you need to do is force it to assume a shape that you find funny. The charm is...Riddikulus!"

Everyone repeated it with varying levels of confidence.

What did Adrian fear the most, what could be plausibly pass off the best? In this situation, anything could compromise him.

Time blurred and moved too quickly, passing down Theo (who had a banshee monster) to Blaise (who had an unrecognizable man.) Draco scoffed and cast the spell perfectly against a gigantic wraith-like monster which Adrian recognized faintly, followed by Crabbe who was nearly shaking at a miniature troll.

Pansy stepped forward, the second to last person to go. She held her wand daintily as the boggart shapeshifted into a giant aractromantuala. It hissed and spluttered angrily, snapping its fangs.

"Ridikkulus!" Pansy barked out, changing its body into a spinning ball which sent it whirling into the cabinet once more.

Pansy grinned, and stepped aside, allowing Adrian to step past.

He could see Draco and the others lean forward excitedly.

The cabinet rattled before opening slowly**.** Bright**,** unmistakably green eyes stared out blankly.

Adrian's jaw clenched and he pointed his wand viciously at the cabinet.

"Why did they go?" It crooned, voice childish and high pitched, unmistakably *young*. "Why did mummy and daddy-"

'None of that' Adrian thought, using his occlumency shields to suddenly cut down on the memories the boggart was feeding on.

It stuttered, the eyes stumbling before wilting and turning dark inside the cabinet. Adrian could see its strange mass bulge and bubble, warping and distorting as it struggled to create a tangible form. Adrian struggled to snap down on anything he could *possibly* fear, anything which made his hair stand on end.

It must have found something, and with a sense of dread Adrian saw it stumble outwards.

There was a pause, the whispers of confusion started before the boggart stepped out in its next assumed form. The lighting was poor, yet the shape was unmistakable.

Adrian gasped audibly and stepped backwards against his better judgement.

Dark wine red eyes belonging to a face with high cheekbones morphed into a disgusted**,** revolted expression. Tall, confident, regally posed with expensive silk.

Draco startled upright, the other Slytherins reeling in surprised noises as they quickly glanced between Adrian and the mystery man. Adrian's dark black hair, almost as blueish tinged as the mans**'**. The tall cheekbones, the aristocratic nose and pale complexion- Adrian's was actually naturally paler.

The resemblance was uncanny.

Adrian felt fear *swallow* him as he glanced at Lupin in barely restrained horror.

The man was at an angle where he was unable to see the boggart's face. Small mercies.

The boggart scoffed, a disorienting sound that made Adrian nearly instinctively whimper.

No, it *wasn't* real.

Adrian's hands curled until his nails left crescents in his palm.

"What a pathetic-"

It's fake. It's fake. It's fake.

Adrian pointed his wand coldly. His expression became flat, emotionless and concerningly casual. He didn't need emotions, he could lock them behind shields. He could remove feelings, he didn't *need feelings.*

"-*weak* vermin. I should-"

It's fake.

You know what to do.

"Ridikkulus."

His father popped backwards, head shifting into one of those comically exaggerated heads he had seen in the store windows of Knockturn Alley. Leather and sun-kissed, embroidered in crossing stitches over its eyes and mouth with bright red floss. It stumbled backwards, blinded and on ungainly limbs.

How clumsy and distorted it looked, like something had grabbed its limbs and stretched it out like a scarecrow.

Oh Merlin, Adrian had turned his father into a *window decoration.*

Adrian felt himself snickering in amusement and trying to hide his smile. He failed dramatically, his body shaking slightly.

Adrian glanced over in surprise as Professor Lupin rushed forward, interjecting himself between Adrian and the Boggart.

It shifted into something white, ethereal...and then vanished into the wardrobe.

"Merlin, what was *that."* Daphne breathed, looking vaguely ill.

Adrian glanced at her in confusion, before he felt his amusement rotting away.

"Nothing," Adrian bit out snappily, glaring and almost curling his lips back in a snarl.

Daphne looked like she had been struck, or Adrian had offered something entirely illogical as rational fact. *Mandrake roots dance the tango.*

"No I…" Daphne blinked completely baffled once again, "I'm sorry, I can't think right now."

Mandrake roots dance the tango and sometimes waltz with centaurs.

Adrian scowled slightly, finding her confusion and obvious dazed expression somewhat aggravating. What was so *wrong* with his boggart? Like hers would be any better!

"Bloody hell," Theo swallowed, looking even more ill than Daphne, "If that's what you think is *funny…"*

Theo trailed off, swaying where he stood as he grimaced and looked nauseous.

Adrian paused and looked over his shoulder where Professor Lupin was instructing the rest of the class how else to hinder or identify a boggart before releasing it.

What was so wrong with the distorted heads in Knockturn? Adrian considered getting one for Bellatrix's birthday once.

"I thought they were funny," Adrian crossed his arms, feeling fairly defensive now, "I once almost bought one."

"Merlin…" Daphne breathed, blinking and gazing off into the distance. She looked eerily similar to Luna in that moment.

"Almost?" Theo inquired weakly.

"We don't talk about it."

The Hogsmeade weekend in November left Adrian walking with a thick wool scarf around his mouth and Lutain nestled against his chest. Lutain was *certain* he was going to get one of those exotic mice bred in Africa which somehow tasted twice as good and was half as easy to digest. The others were planning on starting early holiday shopping.

Adrian had been tasked with even more supplying and selling than the year earlier. Somehow his status had become well known in slytherin, to the point that now the upper years were asking for his help in ordering and dealing questionable goods to the other students. Lutain made an excellent lookout, as well as intimidation technique if students didn't want to comply with his brokering system.

Dementors still circled around the school, staying high above the quidditch pitch in a silent guard to the wizarding school. They were expecting something big, something *deadly.* It was rather annoying, since the students were not permitted to know *why* the dementors were at Hogwarts. Draco had already made a fuss about them, raving about how his father *refused* to tell him information besides how he was upset with the new addition. The Dementors wre generally used to guard Azkaban- so why were they at Hogwarts and not protecting the wizarding prison?

The only thing Adrian could possibly think of was perhaps they were placred at Hogwarts by the Ministry to try and halt the Slytherin Monster from attacking other students. It would be a smart idea, especially since the death of Ginny was still mentioned through hallways.

Nobody seemed to like the dementors, they found them creepy. Ghastly beings that croaked and whistles shallowly while they breathed through rotten lungs. Pansy had *sworn* she heard one talk, a hoarse croaky noise that sent hairs upwards on end.

Adrian thought they were beautiful.

Adrian didn't often have the opportunity to see them up close, mostly due to his reclusive pattern. He only ventured out when he was *positive* that he wouldn't be spotted, or when he wouldn't draw attention to himself. So far, he hadn't actually talked to any of the first years, although Theo informed him his usual clients were getting fed up with his hermit status.

Mostly for appearance's sake, he agreed to venture into Hogsmeade. Already he had seen a quarter dozen clients, each looking somewhat relieved or pissed with him.

Daphne found it interesting, the Pureblood politican that she was.

Hogsmeade was alight with lanterns and loud voices. Children ran from a joke store into a candy store and back again repeatedly. The crowd at the resident pub was overflowing with people.

"Mouse! I want a mouse!" Lutain cheered, inaudible to everyone else there.

"I'll head to the pet store." Adrian found himself saying, already turning without care if anyone heard him or not.

"Oh! I'll come with!" Daphne chirped excitedly, nearly jumping onto his arm with enthusiasm. She smiled widely, actually pretty in comparison to Millicent and Pansy, and started to drag him along.

The protesting noise Draco made was lost in the atmospheric background noise that was Hogsmeade. Her arm was firm, leaving him no room to escape as they walked along the well trodden path towards the store.

The pet store was an old**,** rustic**-**looking building with aged wooden side panels and a resident cat that**,** although it lived in the store, was not for sale. It watched them with friendly blue eyes, brushing against their black robes and leaving calico cat fur in its wake.

"Aren't you adorable?" Daphne cooed, bending down to pet the affectionate cat. "Who's a good boy?"

"Girl," Adrian instantly corrected, "Calicos with multiple colors can only be female."

Daphne had a wistful smile on her face as she eyed the calico as it ran away, the sound of its bell tinkling in the quiet store.

The owner was an elder man with a kind smile more trademark for a candy shop store. He wore small glasses which had an uncanny resemblance to Ollivanders', yet skittered slightly on the anxious side Theo always displayed.

"Hello!" Daphne chirped with pureblood politeness, "This is a wonderful store you have."

The man smiled and Adrian almost snorted at how straightforward Daphne was coming across. Daphne sharply elbowed Adrian's side.

"I have a younger sister and I was wondering if you have anything I could gift her for the approaching holidays," Daphne smiled brightly, her blue eyes sparkling as she looked around the store calmly, "I'm positive that you could find me something."

The man smiled and peered out on of the larger windows, "You may have better luck at Diagon Alley, missus."

Adrian wandered over to one side of the store, which was charmed with a shimmering reddish spell to keep the heat at manageable levels. An assortment of old or full grown animals peered up curiously.

"You resale animals," Adrian stated, looking over his shoulder in surprise, "Doesn't seem much profit in that."

The man looked somber, and more uncomfortable with Adrian than he was with Daphne.

"Too many wizarding children get pets and don't know how to care for 'em. Or don't want 'em anymore. It's a pity, such beautiful creatures."

Adrian smiled sadly and looked down at the assortment. A full grown lizard blinked at him and burped a green bubble.

"Oh no," Daphne exhaled, "Oh *no,* I know that look."

"What look?" Adrian quickly blanked his face, lifting one sleeve to let Lutain slide out and investigate the shop. The owner didn't see.

"The look you get right before you do something stupid," Daphne crossed her arms with a pointed look, "Adrian Selwyn, you are *not* bringing something back with us."

Well of *course* he wasn't. That would be making a large glowing sign practically shouting his name to everyone. He was trying to remain *anonymous*

"Master! Look!" Lutain cheered, peering in at something unseen, *"It is a bird but noble kind! It is like hatchling but large!"*

A cockatrice?

Shit

On one hand, he would be proving a point to Daphne and remaining hidden. He was here *only* for a mouse, or something for Lutain. Maybe an updated heating charm.

But on the other hand….

A *Cockatrice.*

Adrian kept full eye contact with Daphne while he elevated his voice, "How much for the Cockatrice?"

The man spluttered, "The- you mean The Grifdor?"

Daphne groaned, "Don't do it, don't do it, it sounds like bloody *Gryffindor."*

"Master! It is so stupid!"

A Grifdor? The man had a *Grifdor?*

Adrian was trying to remain anonymous….but there was a *Grifdor!*

"I want it." Adrian snapped, looking at the man, "How much?"

The man paled, "Eleven galleons but young man, that animal is very dangerous and was given to me by a very experienced reptile tamer-"

Lutain hissed loudly, rearing up and over the cages to look at the man right in the face. Lutain's scales were darkening back to the usual black and slightly blue tint, his belly starkly yellow in the light.

"That's a Taipan." The man stated bluntly, entirely dumbfounded, "That...how did that-"

"That's my familiar," Adrian said pointedly, "And I want the Grifdor."

How the bloody hell was he going to care for a Grifdor? He didn't have any of the requirements or the objects needed to take care of it.

Then, Adrian was struck with a sense of *genius.*

"Yes!" Lutain cheered excitedly, *"I shall name you -"* Lutain let out a series of hisses Adrian would only be able to replicate in Parseltongue.

He could gift it to Nagini, explicately saying that it *wasn't* for consumption. If Lutain loved it, Nagini would love it too. Then Adrian would *still* have a Grifdor, and better yet, he could visit it over the holidays. The joys of an exotic creature without the work of actually caring for it.

His father couldn't exactly return it, especially with how *he* was the one hiding.

Daphne groaned and rubbed her eyes tiredly, well past the point of tired with Adrian.

"What's its name?" Adrian asked, the man floundered.

"Er... Walter."

Adrian turned to address Daphne seriously, "His name is Walter."

Daphne glared angrily, "I hate you so much sometimes."

Daphne stormed out with an old caramel coloured Puffskein under one arm, and an advanced cage in the other.

Adrian stayed behind, shushing the anxiously chirping Grifdor which seemed to hop around and flare its trimmed wings angrily. Lutain curled on the table, cooing over his new pet with strange serpentine complements.

"Alright, here's a supply of frozen food, should last Walter a month or so." The man worriedly instructed, placing a decently sized parcel on the countertop, "He gets a bit messy but isn't too bad to handle."

Walter squawked and pecked at his foot.

"It's a pity nobody wanted him," Adrian mentioned, glancing at the creature with utmost fascination, "He's beautiful."

And indeed Walter was. He had the upper body and sharp beak of a partridge, yet from the base of its wings he sprouted cream coloured scales which warped into a long serpentine tail. He had slit pupils and the strange mixture of two short nubby fangs on the inside of its beak.

Adrian doubted that he could properly fly, although perhaps he was similar to a pheasant, able to use the long tail as a rudder or for balance as he ran at high speeds.

His father was going to *hate him.*

"Oh I know," The man wheezed with a smile, running a finger down Walter's head and neck with the affection of an old friend, "People just throw away magical creatures all the time. Treat them with no respect."

Adrian found himself nodding along with a wistful smile.

"So! How did you tame a Taipan? I'd expect an enthusiast to have an Ashspore or a Dagger-mouth."

"Lutain?" Adrian blinked, glancing at his darkening friend.

The man's expression lit up, "Oh what a lucky boy you are, to have the fabled Fierce Snake." He smiled and hesitantly reached out with his hand.

"Fierce snake!" Lutain crowed, pausing before boasting wildly, *"I am fierce."*

Adrian smiled as Lutain nuzzled his face against the hand of the man who looked nearly about to pass out from excitement.

"How often do you get rare creatures like this?" Adrian asked, nodding to Walter who had settled to clucking to himself and coiling its tail around his feet, "I could take a few- only the ones that really need it."
Okay, he really couldn't.

Not that he was going to say that to the man, but what if he came across something like a *basilisk?*

The man smiled, timid yet his eyes shone hope like a single star in a blackened night, "Would you, Mr. Selwyn?"

Adrian felt a smile curl on his mouth against his better judgement. Walter looked around and ducked as Adrian ran a single finger down his head and neck, brushing over his wings and smooth scales.

"Is there an owlry around here? For larger parcels?" Adrian inquired carefully, shushing Walter back towards his carrier container. The man nodded and scrambled to find a scrap of parchment, writing out a company on the top.

"Here, if you use the messenger eagles in a hawthorne box, they deliver faster for the holidays." The man added helpfully, scribbling out instructions and which postal service in particular was best for live animals.

"And, I just need to send a confirmation arrangement to the Headmaster now," The man hummed.

Adrian froze.

"No," He blurted instantly, struggling to think on his feet, "That's, that's really not necessary."

The man's face skewed in concern, "I'm sorry, it's store policy…"

"No no, I mean, I'm not sending him to the castle. So he doesn't need to know." Adrian desperately added, the relaxing aura he had achieved started to crumble.

His arms felt cold as a chill raced down his neck and spine, his breathing was hitched and his hands shook slightly.

"I'm sorry, but it really is store policy." The man apologized, looking genuine.

"No no," Adrian shook his head, blinking three times and swallowing quickly, "I...please?"

Adrian didn't hear anything the man said, he could hear his heart pounding loudly. Dumbledore was going to find out, then he would try and *take it* because he isn't *allowed* to have a Grifdor. Then he would ask where it went, he'd ask about Adrian's father and he *would…*

"Whoa, whoa," The man stumbled, reaching out to try and ease Adrian as the younger boy's legs collapsed. The man lowered, trying to help Adrian to the floor as he panicked, entire body shaking.

"Mr. Selwyn," The man fretted nervously, looking for his wand to possibly call for aid.

"You can't," Adrian choked out, eyes blown with panic, "Don't...don't tell Dumbledore."

"I *have* to, I'm not sure why you're so worried." The man tried to soothe, "Can you breathe with me? You're breathing too fast."

Adrian couldn't let him tell Dumbledore.

He didn't know how to do this, but his Father had somehow left him the Occlumency shields, he must have heightened the other skills too.

Adrian couldn't breathe as he jerked his head up, staring at the man's worried eyes.

It couldn't be that hard, could it?

He stared, and tried to *push…*

The man paused, seizing his body as it went tense, a low groaning noise escaping his mouth as Adrian shoved himself in, confused and disoriented and scrambling as much as he could- enough that it would, it *would* work out.

It was going to be okay, it *was* going to be *okay.*

The man's eyes rolled into his head and Adrian gasped in surprise, skittering backwards as the man collapsed. He lay stiff, shuddering twice before resuming a normal breathing pattern.

"Master? What did you do?" Lutain asked quietly, looking at the man in a masked emotion.

"I...I think I scrambled his memory, of us." Adrian swallowed anxiously, "I...we need to go."

Lutain didn't say anything as Adrian quickly scooped the Grifdor, feeling all of the stress he had been working to hide crush downwards on him. His legs wobbled, his bones *ached* and he just wanted to...he just wanted *Bellatrix*

Adrian choked on a sob as he made his way outside, stumbling away towards the one postal service the man had recommended, hurriedly ordering the fastest hawthorne package and silencing the upset Grifdor.

He regretted ever venturing into Hogsmeade.

He should have just stayed in bed.

Here is a link to the fanart for this chapter: Here

Here is a link to my Tumblr where I post all fanart for the story: Here

Patronus

Chapter Summary

> Where Skylar once again beats Adrian, Remus assumes the wrong things, and Adrian casts a spell

Chapter Notes

> Once again, thanks to my beta collective who have helped look over this chapter for errors.
> I hope you enjoy.

For some inexplicable reason, the Dementors grew closer to the castle.

Two students were rushed to Madam Pomfrey after being exposed for too long, both a shaking trembling wreck. They had been outside, testing the Black Lake for possible ice skating when the Dementors swept in like ravenous hounds.

Adrian was in the hallway, watching as Professor Sprout hurried in with both of her students levitating behind her.

That information in itself easily paid off the cost of Walter.

Since the Dementors were growing closer and with more numbers, students began to sell to one another home remedies to bite off the chilling cold. Pepper-Up potions were passed around by the twin Weasleys in the Gryffindor house. (“Better hurry up, Selwyn, they’re running you out of business!” Pansy had snickered over Potion’s class one day).

Ravenclaws cast warming charms and traveled in groups, Hufflepuffs always skirted behind and watched around nervously. The entire dilemma was a fiasco, teachers couldn’t be everywhere at all times.

Aurors were brought in, though only a dozen. They were stationed on patrols around the castle, each observing and casting shielding spells, warming charms when necessary. The House Elves went so far to skirt around the castle with mugs of hot Chocolate just to thank them for the work. The aurors made it much harder to smuggle goods in and out of the castle, forcing Adrian to send Hedwig away just to make sure Walter safely made it to his Father. It wouldn’t be too difficult to find the parcel that contained Walter, or to find the company eagles carrying the hawthorne box.

Sirius Black was back at the castle, as well as James Potter (who the Slytherins all groaned about), joining Professor Lupin with entirely optional classes for learning to perform something called a Patronus Charm. The spell was difficult, high level magic that only upper year students were seriously contemplating.

The spell was something Adrian hadn’t ever heard of. A charm that could deflect Dementors,

prevent them from even getting close? It seemed suspicious to Adrian how his rather detailed book didn't mention the charm *once.* Not even in passing.

Adrian couldn't quite understand the fear, to be completely honest he didn't understand it at all. He could see why some people were uncomfortable or hated Dementors, why they disliked them, but shouldn't you combat them in a fair fight? Attack them when they have a chance to attack back? Make it a *fair* fight? Yet the Patronus charm did none of that, it simply *deflected* the dementors. It formed an impassable barrier like a ward, where the Dementors could still leave you with a fate worse than death.

It baffled Adrian that no wizard had ever constructed a spell to outright hurt or even *kill* a dementor, instead wizards hid behind a simply barrier. Then again, the books he had read seemed to delve so far in depth on the topics they outright ignored information that appeared very basic. Perhaps the Patronus Charm was simply an oversight; the book *did* have an entire chapter that speculated the origins of the cloth like fabric dementors wore.

Adrian figured the cloak he had at his house was hemmed with a Dementor's cloak. The material was cold to the touch, silky smooth like touching smoke.

Adrian wondered if touching a real Dementor would be like that.

He *wanted* to meet one.

(Given that Dementors were important for the cause, his father may actually let him learn to speak or deal with them. Under direct supervision of course)

Meeting a Dementor would have to be done carefully, under the supervision and security of something stronger than an invisibility cloak.

But first, learning a Patronus Charm could help, no matter how unfair he felt the tradeoff was.

The classes would be held before Christmas break, mostly to weed out those who wanted to learn and those who didn't.

The first class was huge, the room filled with upper years with the occasional fifth year. Adrian was there nestled behind two sixth years who were either kind enough or arrogant enough to ignore him. It offered Adrian the prime viewpoint to watch as none other than Skylar Potter and Hermione walked in, Ron Weasley trailed further back and seemed grudging to actually join the other two. That was a surprise, when had the famous trio fought or broken up?

Whispers started, low mumbles about how it was *ridiculous* for a third year to cast a patronus, or how if anyone could do it, *Skylar* could.

"Settle down!" Lupin shouted, clapping his hands loudly. James Potter nodded in greeting to Skylar, who smiled back. Sirius Black shifted his weight from side to side, looking around eagerly.

"Today will be a demonstration of the Patronus Charm. The Patronus is a piece of *very* complex magic, and very few people are capable of performing it. It creates a guardian that acts as a shield between you and the dementor. Thankfully, we have my friends and assistants who will demonstrate for us today."

Sirius whipped out his wand excitedly, James Potter following with a wink as they both spoke the

charm at the same time.

From the ends of the wands, a silvery mist expelled, solidifying into two animals which pranced around on the ground. A large silver dog ran around with a slobbering tongue, drool vanishing the moment it left its long tongue. A proud doe jumped around, tossing her head daintily before she playfully kicked at the dog with careful precision.

The upper years cooed excitedly, females laughing at the adorableness of the dog and how *beautiful* the doe was.

“Thankfully, to show that the spell is achievable by others, I have already been teaching Mr. Skylar Potter how to perform it. If you would,” Lupin nodded with a professional smile, beckoning with one hand towards an open area.

The room hushed and Skylar awkwardly stepped forward, brandishing his wand and shouting the spell.

From his wand, sluggishly compared to his father and Sirius, silver mist formed into the shape of a deer, some sort of blurred fawn which was much smaller than Sirius’ dog.

No, not quite right. It had antlers, a strange shape and a unique pelt splattered with darker shades of silver. An antelope? Or a Gazelle?

The deer-like patronus ran and jumped right into Sirius’ dog, knocking it over and playing on the ground. The doe slowly lowered itself to the ground, watching the two animals playing with affection.

Potter could already perform the Patronus.

Adrian’s jaw clenched in agitation, of *course* Skylar had been receiving lessons already.

The class went on to describe the properties of the spell, and how it needed to be fueled by the happiest memory one had. The happier the memory, the stronger the patronus.

They weren’t allowed to actually perform the spell yet, instead they all watched and learned more.

Adrian didn’t know what his patronus could possibly be, not to mention what could be his happiest memory.

He couldn’t stand to be in the room any longer. It was stifling.

The other students began clearing out, everyone talking about what animals they hoped they would form or their best memories to use. Adrian was almost out before he heard a stiff and cocky voice call his name.

“Mr. Selwyn!”

Adrian twitched but turned silently.

James Potter had a smirk, arms crossed over his chest cockily. “Did you like the presentation?”

Adrian’s jaw twitched. Of course, James Potter would have remembered him.

He did leave a rather memorable impression his first year, not to mention James Potter had a rather infamous stigma for singling out children of death-eaters.

Skylar floundered, shaking his head and looking ready to interupt and stop his father in his tracks. Adrian felt his hands twitch and his nerves rise up. Did James Potter know something? Had he slipped up somehow?

“James, none of that,” Lupin scolded, stepping forward with a small frown, “Mr. Selwyn is my student, not a child to patronize.”

Sirius’ jaw dropped, “But Remus-”

“None of that!” Remus rolled his eyes, “Go find the Weasley twins, or take Skylar out to Hogsmeade**.**”

James laughed awkwardly but clapped Lupin on his shoulder before heading out. Skylar paused, looking at Adrian with an unrecognizable expression before he turned and walked out. Hermione and Ron were waiting by the door, looking stiff and uncomfortable with each other but somehow still friends. They must have had some fight.

Soon it was just Professor Lupin and Adrian alone in the room.

“I noticed when you came in, Mr. Selwyn.” Professor Lupin divulged calmly, settling on a nearby chair to lower the height difference, “You were the only third year to come to my lesson today.”

“Besides Skylar and his friends.” Adrian coldly pointed out, “I should have guessed that *he* was getting lessons.”

Lupin nodded, pursing his lip thoughtfully, “That’s true, but then again he did have a bad reaction to the Dementors. He needed it for protection more than just to master advanced spellwork. You don’t seem the type to learn such difficult spellwork for the thrill of it.”

Adrian shrugged and avoided eye contact on the offhand chance that Lupin was a Legilimens.

“So what is it?” Professor Lupin asked kindly, crossing his ankles together, “Is it for information? Quite a business you’ve started.” He winked and once again smiled encouragingly.

Adrian blinked, taken aback by the conversation. It was weird to think of this as a teacher and not a gentle uncle or some sort.

Adrian felt a shiver of deja-vu.

“Thank you, Sir.It has its uses.” Adrian cautiously agreed

“Yes, yes, financial I assume.” Professor Lupin added, starting to chew on his lower lip, “It worries me, not as a teacher but as a person, that a student as young as you has to go through such means for finances.”

“It’s useful-”

“Yes yes, I know, you can purchase all sorts of treats with a few sickles of change.” Professor Lupin smiled reaching into his pocket to find a few cauldron cakes, offering one nicely, “Merlin knows I snuck over to Honeydukes when I was your age, James, Sirius and I were quite the rule breakers. I’d be a hypocrite to scold you. Would you like a pastry?”

What was going *on?* Did the man not realize that Adrian had long since moved on from bartering *sweets?*

Professor Lupin opened one of the cakes, biting into it carefully and addressing Adrian once again, “Do you have sweets often? At your home?”

Adrian paused, “Sometimes. My father isn’t…I have them on occasion.”

“Oh, yes.” Professor Lupin smiled, “That would be the man your boggart turned into, It concerns me why your father is your greatest fear, Mr. Selwyn.”

“That’s what this is about?” Adrian blinked, nibbling on the cake with dainty bites, “My father just has high expectations.”

“Right, right,” Professor Lupin soothed, pausing before his expression became incredibly concerned, “I couldn’t help but notice your upper left arm.”

Adrian’s hand flashed to his arm where he knew the thin white scar was located. Bellatrix had always said it was an accident.

“Would you mind if I took a look?”

Adrian knew he couldn’t refuse or it would look worse. He shrugged off his outer robe, sliding up the partial sleeves to show the white line against the outer edge of his upper arm. Professor Lupin took his arm very carefully, calloused fingers touched his skin.

“This is a mark from a cutting curse, Adrian.” Professor Lupin exhaled shortly, “...Do you have anymore marks, or scars from your father?”

“What?” Adrian’s jaw dropped in shock, “What... no, *no*. He didn’t...”

“Mr. Selwyn, I know normally you’d go to your head of house, however I felt the need to intrude. If you would like, I’d gladly speak to Professor Snape about this, or I could not. Nothing you tell me will be told to others, unless you intend to take legal action.” Professor Lupin sighed, “I only want to help you.”

Adrian stared, swallowing before looking at his feet.

He was in a rough situation.

He could deny everything, which would bring more attention to his father for suspected child abuse. He could tell a lie, some sort of constructed nonsense about who had hurt him, but then they would be investigated for legal purposes.

He’d have to construct a story, a parental figure who was already in prison or arrested under charges where child abuse wouldn’t be that outrageous.

Oh.

“Everything I say will stay private.” Adrian repeated, obviously looking skeptical.

“Of course,” Professor Lupin smiled, “I can involve my friends if you would prefer aurors when you return-”

Adrian lifted his eyebrows in disbelief, causing the other man to wince, “Alright, perhaps not. Are you in any danger at this time?”

“No.”

Professor Lupin looked relieved. “Who caused that scar, Adrian?”

“My aunt,” Adrian paused, “Bellatrix Lestrange.”

Professor Lupin flinched away in shock, growing pale as one hand covered his mouth. For some reason, Professor Lupin’s eyes seemed to flare golden for a brief moment.

“No wonder you wanted to learn the patronus charm,” Professor Lupin shivered.

Then his arms reached out and gently tugged Adrian to his chest, hugging him closely against his low quality brown robes. A chin rested on Adrian’s head, tucking him further in.

Adrian froze.

What was this. What was going *on.*

“I’m so sorry,” Professor Lupin exhaled sadly, “But here on Hogwarts, you’re safe. You won’t be hurt here. It wasn’t your fault.”

Adrian was getting hugged. He was being hugged by Professor Lupin.

‘Oh, no Harry, none of this was your fault. You don’t have to be sorry for anything.’

‘I’m so sorry.’

Adrian flinched away in a jerk, stumbling back into the open area of the room. His chest heaved back and forth quickly, his eyes stung with the confusion.

“No, no i’m *Adrian.”* He muttered under his breath, shoving his emotions behind his occlumency shields quickly, “I’m *Adrian.”*

“Alright, I’ve been keeping you too long,” Lupin blinked quickly, trying to compose himself quickly, recovering after Adrian’s jerk away “I’m so sorry, that was terribly unprofessional.”

“No, no it’s fine.” Adrian paused, uncertain on how to convey when he felt, “I’m not used to it.”

“To being hugged?” the golden eyes softened like melting metal, “Oh, Adrian.”

Adrian bowed his head and ignored it, looking out the window. It was starting to get darker out, the nights were longer than the days now.

No, there was something else.

Remus Lupin, Adrian *remembered* Remus Lupin. He was, he was Harry Potter’s *godfather.*

He took him to an expo, an animal showing. He took him and there was a manticore... there was a snake. It had all been a disaster, flashes of screaming and of broken doors. The shrill death throes begging for mercy.

Remus Lupin was a werewolf.

“I like magical creatures.” Adrian blurted, not aware that he had spoken at all. Lupin nodded slowly.

“That’s common. Abused children tend to empathize with creatures and animals more.”

“I’m *not* abused.” Adrian protested with a scowl, “People are just all…”

Lupin’s knowing look made him cut off his terrible excuse.

“Where do you go?” Adrian blurted, shifting and looking uncomfortable, “You’re a werewolf.”

Lupin froze and his skin paled. His hands trembled slightly and he curled them into fists, lowering them to his sides to try and stop any physical signs of distress.

“Why do you want to know?” Lupin’s voice was strained, he stood and started pacing wildly, running one hand through his hair, “You’re not-?”

“No,” Adrian blinked, “I’m not.”

Lupin’s smile was strained, thin and somehow in the lighting Lupin looked more wolf like than ever before. “I think I’ve taken enough of your time tonight, Mr. Selwyn.”

Adrian returned home for Christmas break with the intentions of retrieving his secret cloak, as well as to make sure Walter was settling in okay.

Hedwig had apparently returned to the manor with Walter’s shipment right during morning tea. Not only did Walter awake and eat an entire slice of toast, but he also indulged himself with his father’s tea before the Dark Lord realized that what was occurring was actually real.

Nagini loved having a pet. For some reason Walter enjoyed nesting in Nagini’s coils, and reacted equally to Parseltongue as it did to English.

“This isn’t going to be the only pet you bring home, is it?” his father sighed, looking at how Nagini fussed over how Walter’s shed was getting slightly stuck. His father couldn’t argue, especially with how happy Nagini seemed to be.

“Would you be surprised if I got a dragon?” Adrian asked jokingly, only to receive a glare.

“No dragon.”

“Yes father.”

“Expecto Patronum.” Adrian muttered, sitting on a chair outside, looking over the forests and the gardens of the house.

His wand made a faintly silvery mist, but that was it.

“Expecto Patronum.” Adrian tried again, speaking through gritted teeth.

There was a pathetic spatter of sparks before once again, nothing.

Adrian shouted angrily, nearly throwing his wand across the yard, “If Potter can do it why can’t I!”

The door behind him opened loudly, causing Adrian to scramble backwards and look over his shoulder in surprise.

His father stood in the doorway, arms crossed with the most unimpressed expression.

“Maybe that’s because you’re *not* a spoiled brat.”

If Adrian wasn’t so angry, he would have known better than to rant.

“But I can cast any spell better than him!” Adrian seethed, fist clenching in anger as rage rose, “It’s not fair, I should be able to *cast it!”*

His father rolled his eyes, “You have anger problems. Control it before I make you.”

Adrian grumbled but looked down resigned, frustration and the starting sting of tears burning his eyes.

“The Patronus charm,” His father started, “Is a difficult spell. I only learned to perform it in my sixth year, of course, I was self taught.”

“Is this supposed to make me feel better?” Adrian sighed, sliding over a seat for his father to sit next to him, “Why don’t you lower the warming charm? Make the temperature as cold as you are.”

His father gave a sigh before he drew his own wand- pale white and intimidating yew.

“Expecto Patronum...” From his wand a large snake jumped out, thick and powerful, Nagini rearing and glowing silver in the cold air.

“How-” Adrian scrambled upright, looking at the ghostly serpent in awe as he ran his fingers through her intangible bulk.

“Adrian, come here.” His father ordered, red eyes smoldering in the light, “I’ll show you a trick.”

Adrian complied, sitting as close to his father as he could pulling out his wand and waiting. “I grabbed my Holly Wand- I figured that it would make it easier.”

His father hummed a sound and beckoned for Adrian to try again.

“Expecto Patronum.” Adrian started, motivated by his father’s company. His wand spluttered and only a faint mist formed, he groaned disappointed.

“What are you thinking of?”

“Lutain, meeting him.” Adrian felt a smile form on his mouth, “And just the general impression.”

His father clicked his tongue, “Not specific enough. It has to be a very specific moment or memory.”

Adrian’s jaw dropped, “but I don’t have a single memory better than that.”

“Neither did I. I invented one.”

Adrian looked at his father in awe, “You can *do that?”*

“With enough self control and motivation, you can create any memory. Allow me...”

Adrian felt the pressure in the back of his mind crack- the black eyelid sliding open to grant access to the creeping mist through his head.

Adrian whined, starting to slump backwards as his eyesight looked so far away. The black coils of something with no start or ending was twisting around his body, suffocating and caressing.

“I’ve got you.” His father spoke, the sound entirely inaudible and yet somehow understandable. Vibrations from his speaking went through Adrian’s back, warming his chest and body.

He could hear the whispered *‘oh’* as it found something that it was so carefully probing, searching for something.

Adrian’s mouth moved without his control. His words were velvety smooth yet undeniably his own voice. “Expecto Patronum.”

Adrian felt his magic move and from his wand a silvery beast emerged, much larger than he had expected but still smaller than Nagini. It crawled, scraping scales and belly plates as its protruding teeth flowed ethereally. It growled lowly, a reverberating warning noise which was felt through the air itself- morphing into a guttural hiss as it opened its mouth slowly. The jaws snapped shut violently.

The coil in his mind retreated, slithering through the open eye before it closed gently without a trace. The patronus evaporated.

Adrian snapped back into his body with a groan, twitching as he regained movement in his hands and feet.

“You back with the living?” His father asked, voice thick with amusement.

“Warn me next time,” Adrian grunted, raising a hand to rub against his eyes, hardly believing that the crocodile-esq creature was real.

The next thing Adrian realized was the he was reclining firmly against his father’s side, one large arm wrapped around his midsection to keep him upright.

“I implanted false memories in your head,” His father spoke again, this time Adrian could feel the vibrations through his back, “They were sufficient enough with your personality to conjure the patronus.”

Adrian straightened, rolling his shoulders to try and remove all of the fogginess. “What memory?” Adrian mumbled, wincing at the post possession tremors.

His father only looked at him, a side glanced look with ruby eyes; the Dark Lord said nothing and instead ruffled Adrian’s hair once before leaving. Adrian practically melted at the touch.

The air was much colder without a warm body near him. He ached to have that warmth back.

Adrian blinked, then tried to recall what possibly could have been implanted.

“Harry I- I know that we haven’t been the best, but you have to understand-”

“Skylar is the Boy-Who-Lived and needs extra protection because dark wizards still are angry with him. I know mum, Skylar is more-”

“Harry, I- how about tomorrow we head over to the expo. Just you and me? I thought there was something about a baby hydra there. I know your father isn’t fond of reptiles, except Merlin knows

he has a problem with dragons, but-"

"I think I'd like to go. I mean, It's okay if we need to clean up, or if Skylar wants to go somewhere else. I don't have to go, I can always-"

"We're going"

The moment was ruined when a witch called out for Lily loudly, having her grandson timidly hiding behind her large green frock coat. Lily looked torn but ultimately made her decision as she hurried over, leaving Harry alone on the porch once again.

Harry glanced back at the white paint on the deck and scraped his nail across the path of a particularly adventurous ant.

"What did the ant ever do to you?" A drawling dry tone caused Harry to glance up in surprise, a smile spreading unbidden.

"You came!" Harry smiled, trying not to look as excited as he actually was, "I didn't think you'd come since it's Skylar's-"

Adrian's father chuckled, settling down awkwardly on the porch next to Adrian, slinging one arm around the young boy's carelessly, "As far as *i'm* concerned, this is your party."

"Really?" Adrian asked sadly, exhaling and slinking downwards, "It seems like nobody notices me."

Adrian's father scoffed, "because they're ignorant morons. They can't see the raw potential, they're stuck with their heads too high; the brooms help with that."

Adrian cracked a smile before looking down, fiddling with his shirt.

"Head up," Adrian's father snapped suddenly, causing Adrian to jerk his head upright and sit straighter.

"Now, listen to me," His father started, red eyes locking to convey how serious he was, "That mudblood and blood traitor don't know what they're tossing away. They don't see how much better you are, they're too captivated by that *rotten* boy."

Two long hands cupped his jaw, angling his head upright to make sure everything was heard, "You are going to be the *best,* they'll come to regret every glance they've given you."

"Why?" Adrian's voice broke, his eyes were welling against his will, "Why help me?"

Tom Riddle's eyes softened and he smiled something gentle, "because you're my son. And because I-"

Adrian snapped his head up, feeling the wavering warming charm keeping out the holiday chill.

The night was dark, and Adrian's cheeks were wet.

"Ex-Expecto Patronum."

The patronus lumbered out, dragging heavy scale plates over the ground with the lethargic grace of

a predator.

Investigating

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian can't calm down, things escalate, and Daphne is nosy.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to my wonderful beta's for helping me with this chapter.

The cloak *was* made out of Dementor cloak material. His father had confirmed it when he asked.

When a dementor dies, the withered soul inside its body changes to dust, leaving behind the remains of the cloak.

It took impressive skill to get that close to a Dementor. It also took bravery and guts. The type of courage needed to face down an angry dragon, or calm a raging manicore. Yet it took careful planning, cautious well-thought prediction. It took ambition.

The courage and ambition needed to awaken a sleeping basilisk.

"Isn't that right, Adalonda?"

Before his eyes, the large coiled sleeping reptile slowly began to stir, twitching and tensing each muscle in the slow steps to awakening.

"Hello?" She grumbled, the voice echoing loudly around the walls of the chamber.

"Time to wake up, Adalonda," Adrian hissed, smiling excitedly, *"What do you know about Dementors?"*

"Selwyn!"

Adrian groaned and looked up. Daphne had her hands on her hips, a calculating expression on her face. "What ever happened to that Gryffindor monster?"

"Oh, must be talking about you Draco," Theo sniped up, snickering past as he plopped a pile of books on the table, too many books for one person.

"You're the one with hair like a drowned rat." Draco scowled, dropping onto a couch and throwing his arms on the back of the couch, "Adrian, four galleons to make my Care essay."

"Do it yourself," Adrian grunted, "Fire Crabs are the easiest thing to write about."

Draco groaned and leant his head back on the couch.

"The monster!" Daphne started up again, "What did you do with it!"

"Adrian adopt another pet?" Theo asked excitedly, "Is it a snake? Like your tattoo?"

"Wait- *wait,"* Daphne floundered in shock, Draco jolted upright and Theo shrunk back.

"You have a *tattoo*, Selwyn?" Draco gasped, "How big!"

Daphne leant forward excitedly as well, her eyes raking over his body as if she could see through clothing.

Adrian scowled, "That's information you'd need to pay for."

"Ten galleons." Draco retorted.

"Twenty," Daphne challenged, "And I'll get your snake a rat."

"Do it." Lutain gurgled, poking his head up excitedly, *"Do it for the rat."*

Adrian's jaw twitched, "Deal. Four feet."

All three eyes grew large, *"Whoa,"* Daphne breathed, looking over his body excitedly.

"Miss Greengrass?" A younger voice piped up, short and barely taller than the couch, "Can I ask for some help?"

"Master!" Lutain hissed angrily, scenting the air and scanning his head frantically, *"The girl, I scent the girl!"*

"Who?" Adrian asked, voice teasing enough to be interpreted as a jab.

"The girl! The hellspawn-"

"Oh ignore him, he's the resident potions dealer." Daphne rolled her eyes teasingly, "I don't think you've met. Malfoy, Nott, Selwyn, meet my friend Suzan."

The girl rounded the couch and offered a large cheeky smile, just shy of mocking.

No.

No.

Adrian *froze.*

Draco sniffed, "Picking up strays now, Greengrass?"

"Never, that's Selwyn's job." Daphne smiled sweetly, patting the couch next to her for Suzie to join them, "Isn't that right?"

Suzie skipped over and sat on the couch, painfully close to Adrian. Adrian flinched away, as if Suzie's skin was toxins.

Oh Merlin.

No. Lutain was *right there.*

"Master, i'm going to bite her." Lutain hissed angrily, still thriving in memory of all of the terrible

instances with the same girl, *"Don't stop me."*

"Don't." Adrian bit out sharply, voice cold and fingering the edge of malicious. The word had such a bite it made Suzie full out flinch, Daphne jolt in alarm as well.

"What's gotten your knickers in a twist?" Draco sighed, reaching out for his scroll of parchment, "Just help us with this essay."

"It's about a *fire crab."* Adrian hissed, leaning forward to slam his fist on the table between them, smoke rising from where his hand impacted, "Do it *yourself!"*

Theo stopped writing his essay, his quill scratching quieted and all eyes were locked on Adrian. He tensed his jaw, twitching wildly and the air between Suzie and him was practically *burning...*

"I see why people don't like you." Suzie grimaced, starting to absentmindedly pick at her nails.

Adrian's entire body froze, his mind blanking as it struggled to even compute.

"She's dead! She's dead!" Lutain shrieked, rising in a terrifying display that left even Daphne grabbing and pulling Suzie back.

Suzie gasped, squealing like a stuck pig as Daphne pulled her over the armrest to flop painfully onto the floor.

"Whoa whoa!" Theo garbled, jumping to his feet and away from the coffee table where the very much *deadly snake* was displaying itself.

"Listen here, *Suzie,"* Adrian snarled, rising and summoning all of the malicious fury he had. His voice was cracking as it rose in pitch, displaying how close to puberty he was yet not changing how *scary* he sounded. She froze stock still, paling in fear as Lutain coiled around his neck, "This is *my house.* You can say many things, but if you mess with me *one more time;* I will make you *wish* you were a squib."

Suzie couldn't blink, trapped in Adrian's unwavering gaze. Toxic green somehow dancing on the edges of something lethal, suffocating and leaving her eyes watering for something unknown...

"Hey hey, she's a first year, lay off."

Adrian snapped his gaze to the side, meeting Draco who froze instantly in horror. Draco hadn't ever seen Adrian so absolutely….

Furious.

Suzie was reaching for her wand, trying to be subtle with it.

"Master! She spells!"

Adrian flicked out his wand and without even thinking cast a combat spell directly at Suzie.

"Get down!" Daphne shrieked, shoving Suzie off the couch where the curse hit the back of the leather. It smoked and smoldered something rank.

Lutain jumped off, leaping towards Suzie with the maddening intent of killing her in the primitive rage of an angry serpent.

"Wingardium Leviosa!" Theo gasped, snatching Lutain in mid jump to keep him suspended.

"Lutain!" Adrian gasped in surprise, turning with single minded fury. His hands clenched and the smell of burning leather increased.

"Stupify!" Draco shot out, Adrian deflected it with the finally perfected Protego.

The Prefects ran into the room, finally hearing the shouts and responding accordingly.

"All of you! Stop this!" The new female prefect shouted, her voice going overheard in the shouting.

"Flipendo!" Adrian growled, shooting the jinx at the couch where Suzie ducked behind just in time.

Daphne bolted away, leaving Suzie on her own, Theo had run for cover as well leaving it fairly obvious that Suzie was the intended target.

"Let me down! Let me down!" Lutain shrieked angrily.

"Don't move!" Suzie screamed, pointing her wand at Lutain instead of Adrian, "Or I'll blast the snake!"

A chaotic medley of people protesting rose loudly.

"No no!" Draco shouted in horror, "*Don't* blast the snake!"

Theo looked at Daphne with an expression of helplessness, "She threatened the snake."

Daphne looked pained, as if she had just witnessed something immensely stupid.

A loud buzzing and a surge of hate rose in Adrian, his eyes flashed. His eyes met Suzie, locking on and somehow they were so close amidst the chaos and snapping couches and loud shouts.

"Lutain, bite her." Adrian hissed, not realizing he was speaking Parseltongue. His words and voice drowned out in the chaotic swell of activity. Except for one person who was paying particularly hard attention.

Suzie's eyes widened noticeably as she inhaled sharply in surprise.

Multiple things happened at once.

The Slytherin prefect petrified both Adrian and Suzie in two strong charms. Lutain was blasted backwards from a messy spell, hitting the wall and passing out. The leather couch burst into flame entirely and raged so high it smoldered the ceiling for a split second.

Adrian hit the cold floor with a loud click, trying to quell the anger flurrying through him like a winter snowstorm.

'You have anger problems. Control it before I make you.'

Adrian exhaled and tried not to focus on how his magic felt so sour.

"Alright you two." The prefect's nostrils flared, glaring at Adrian without glancing at Suzie, "I don't care *what* you two were fighting about, but *not again.* You're lucky I don't call Professor Snape down here right now." She threatened.

It would be much more frightening if it wasn't for how Adrian didn't even bother to know her name.

She cast the counter spell, leaving Suzie in a shaking mess on the ground, nursing a heavily leaking nose with snot.

"Now get out of here." The prefect snapped, pointing at the door out of the common room. Suzie scampered away, Adrian stood slower, glaring with a prickling aura of irritability. He walked over, picking up the limp Lutain with uncharacteristic tenderness before settling him in a pocket of his inner robe.

Everyone gave him a wide berth, Draco and Daphne wouldn't even look at him. Theo shook in the silence of the room.

Adrian didn't need friends. They just got in the way.

He intended to go to the Hospital Wing to see if he could smuggle potions from Madam Pomfrey. A bruising salve, or a pain relief; Lutain needed *something* in his current state.

He was nearing the hallways, most empty with the population in the dining hall for the evening meal. He wasn't expecting to find anyone.

"Mr. Selwyn?"

Adrian tried not to look up, he sped up his pace ever so slightly, hunched forward to protect the limp rope that was his best friend.

A large warm hand settled on his shoulder, halting his walk and turning him into the gaze of the worried Professor Lupin.

"You've been crying?" Professor Lupin asked, immediately alarmed, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." Adrian ground out, looking away to prevent making eye contact. His face felt sticky and sore.

"Ah," Professor Lupin started, the sound was too gentle, "My private chambers then? Just this way, we can talk in private if you'd like."

Adrian turned and nodded slightly.

They didn't meet anyone in the hallways which was a pleasant surprise. Professor Lupin's private quarters were hidden behind a scenic painting of a valley in remote wilderness. Lavender and wildflowers swayed in a faint breeze, opening to reveal an ornate wooden door.

"It's not much, but I hope it'll suffice." Professor Lupin smiled, holding the door open for Adrian who quietly walked in, quickly evaluating all corners of the entry room.

It was roughly the size of Adrian's own room, although it was only the entryway. If Draco had been correct, there would be an attached lavatory and bedroom. Often another bedroom appeared for guests although Adrian didn't see the door.

"Now, what seems to be the problem, Mr. Selwyn?"

Adrian opened his robe and withdrew Lutain, still out cold and pliable in his hands.

Lupin instantly dropped to his knees near Adrian, pulling his wand to mumble various healing charms.

"They're just to tell how hurt your friend is," Lupin soothed calmly, "They won't hurt him."

"I know," Adrian paused, "I know how to cast a few myself."

Lupin glanced at him with an unreadable expression before he jumped back into helping Lutain.

A few tense moments later Lupin left before coming back with a small vial, "This potion needs to be given, only a few drops considering snakes are cold blooded. But, his venom-" Lupin hesitated, wary of Lutain's bite. It was realistic of course.

"I'll do it." Adrian mumbled, using his short cracked nails to pry against his reptile's lips, pressing against the jaw joint to force it open.

It was dangerous how close his friends' fangs were. He knew firsthand how frightening they were.

A few drops into Lutain's mouth and Adrian placed the long snake in a loose coil on the chair beside him, watching him breathe for a few minutes carefully.

"What happened?" Lupin asked politely, "I assume there must have been a fight. I didn't think you would lose your temper so easily."

"Because of Bellatrix?" Adrian snapped, glaring with flared nostrils, "Because I never went running to another teacher?"

"I didn't say that." Professor Lupin added, "I just said you didn't seem the type to have a short temper."

Obviously he didn't know Adrian.

They stared at each other, the silence broken by a ticking clock on the wall.

"How was your change?" Adrian asked, noticing the slight marks on Lupin's exposed neck. It would be dismissed as minor scratching, except Adrian knew the look of freshly healed wounds. The full moon was only two days earlier after all.

"Painful." Lupin confessed, "how was your Winter break?"

Adrian stared, trying to determine what Lupin was trying to get from him, "Not. Not painful I mean."

Lupin looked much too happy for Adrian to bear.

"Why?" Adrian blurted, "Why do you make me your pet project? Why are you so *determined* to help me?"

Professor Lupin aged before his eyes many years. Wrinkles set and changed the shape of his mouth, altering his entire complexion into something old and tired.

"I-" Lupin frowned, rubbing his eyes with an old sigh, "I care for my students-"

"No, you don't." Adrian's lip curled, "You have attachment for me." Adrian's eyes narrowed, "*Why me?"*

"Adrian-"

"*No!"* Adrian hissed in English, jumping upright with his temper prickling once again, "Why

me? *Why?"*

Professor Lupin stared at Lutain carefully, pointing for emphasis, "That's an impressive pet. Not many students actually have pet snakes, I've noticed. Beautiful creature."

"Some people would say the same about werewolves."

Finally he grew uncomfortable. "Most people find them horrifying."

"Most people hate Dementors, I don't think you do." Adrian pointed out, watching Professor Lupin's golden eyes carefully, "I think, you find they're *fascinating."*

Professor Lupin leant back in his chair heavily, crossing his leg at his knee, "That's a strange thing to say. Especially considering the unfortunate fact that they seem to be outside our every window."

"You know quite a bit about them," Adrian's throat quivered, "tell me about them."

Professor Lupin's brow momentarily twitched before he gave a small nod and his voice deepened slightly, slipping into his lecture more.

"Very well then, Mr. Selwyn. Dementors are considered by the ministry as a non-being, a classification other creatures such as Lethifold, Hidebehind, Shades, and boggarts share. They are called this because at no point are they ever truly 'alive' in the sense we all know it."

"They can't die, or that's what they say." Adrian added, peering out over a window sightless, "Yet you can kill a boggart."

"That's a bit difficult to explain, boggarts only barely fit the profile as they can die in the assumed forms they take when feeding on fear**.**" Lupin explained, pausing to gather his words, "I've never recalled an instance of another non-being dying, although they are relatively rare."

"Dementors in question have the ability to suck the soul out of a person. They can feed on the happiest memories someone has, draining all hope, love, and compassion out until they are but an empty husk." Professor Lupin continued, his voice strangely relaxing.

"The patronus charm is the only known way to repel a Dementor- as you saw from my first lesson. I expected to see you at my lessons, why did you never-"

"I know how to cast it," Adrian mumbled out, "I learned it without you."

"...Do you learn your spells on your own then?"

Adrian sighed through his nose and crossed his arms, "How long has Dumbledore had an interest in me?"

It was a small question- Adrian hadn't actually noticed Dumbledore looking at him. He hadn't interacted with the man.

Considering his track record already, Adrian was almost *positive* that the man was watching him.

It was a reasonable fear. His father had told him time and time again to watch his movements.

Lupin smiled thinly, "Since your boggart."

Shite, the man *was* watching him.

Adrian nodded faintly, trying not to appear as dazed as he felt, "Of course, you report all of your student's fears' to the Headmaster then?"

"Only child abuse cases." Lupin carefully controlled, "Your last name alarmed me. Blood adoption?"

Adrian froze, breathing stopping as his eyes widened comically.

"Here," Lupin offered, rising to his personal desk before retrieving a single leaf of paper, poking it with his wand and opening it carefully. He folded it a number of times, walking over to point out two small names and a figure of footsteps.

Remus Lupin

Hadrianus Selwyn-Riddle

"You were adopted by purebloods, but somehow you were raised by Bellatrix Letrange." Lupin sighed, "None of this the Headmaster needs to know."

Adrian laughed incredulously, "You're *not* going to tell him?"

"Unless you give me a reason, getting in another fight, for example." Lupin pointedly stated, "He doesn't need to know anything besides your perfect exam scores."

"You want me to do better than your godson?" Adrian's eyebrows rose.

"I don't have a godson, Mr. Selwyn." Lupin tersely pointed out, "besides, I figure James's face would be fun to watch."

Adrian almost coughed a laugh, "That would be a sight, wouldn't it."

"Allow me the privilege of seeing it firsthand, and I'll tell you anything you'd like to know about magical creatures."

Adrian snapped his head up, "Tell me about being a werewolf."

Lupin nodded, as if considering the deal, "Tell me about living with Bellatrix Lestrange."

Adrian's jaw quivered, his throat swallowing rapidly. "Touche."

"Dementors are such sick creatures." Adalonda grumbled, watching amusedly the antics of the smaller beings, *"Old tales said that they borne from sickened children."*

"And that's not true?" Adrian asked, using Parseltongue for the flow of the conversation.

"No, little one." Adalonda chuckled, closing her eyes to relax on the surreally warm stone of the floor, *"Tis other beings which borne from child's last breath."*

"Have you seen one? A Demon-ter?" Lutain enthused, nearly blending into the darkness with how his scales were black once more.

"I have," Adalonda cooed, *"Many seasons and many men ago. When I breathed air and hunted in sun. They were such foul things, perverse and greedy. Mercenaries for those in need."*

"Mercenaries?" Adrian asked, *"How could a nonliving be a mercenary?"*

"They spoke none but transferred the final breath of those who wanted." Adalonda rumbled, her body relaxing and tensing with every breath, *"If not religion who determines your soul what does?"*

"People used them as executioners back then, that's so fascinating." Adrian blinked, imagining the weathered hands and the ghastly faces under the cloaks.

"Aye, formidable weapons but the toll too high. I have heard of kings selling kingdoms for aid in battle, fools betting worse for a chance of fate."

"You can bribe a Dementor?" Adrian asked, a smile slowly spreading *"How? How do you bribe a Dementor?"*

"Souls most prideful. Those who would not bow to those cowardly or weak." Adalonda explained, *"Knights and knaves were fodder in their breath."*

"Those who wouldn't bow to the weak." Adrian murmured out loud, thinking of who would fulfill that end of the bargain.

And, *oh.*

He had just the creature in mind.

Daphne changed from the one eventful day of reckoning in the Slytherin common room. At first Adrian assumed that she was having another argument with her roommate, Tracey Davis, but as it started to go on and on, Adrian realised it was something else at work.

At age thirteen, fourteen in some students, his classmates began to change. More ramped on hormones and desire to perform well, and occasionally insult every Gryffindor that walked past.

Adrian was no exception, he found his temper slowly impairing his other functions. Since his brawl with Suzie, he had targeted and exchanged spells with a Hufflepuff and an overconfident Gryffindor boy.

Draco started casually throwing around the expression, *'burning angry'* which infuriatingly caught on quickly in Slytherin. Even applicable to others, the expression was used when the threat of spells or a fight was just *barely* restrained.

Other people were annoying, they were *constantly* wanting help or information, favors or papers, wanting him to purchase and give them the perfect gift or object.

It was exhausting to the point of reducing Adrian to simple introvert. Normally this wasn't a problem, if anyone wanted his direct presence they would tell Theo, who was the only one able to open the room. The rare occasion where Adrian stumbled out he normally wore sloppy sleep clothing, it made most purebloods sneer in disgust.

More than anything, Adrian was *confused.*

Why had Lupin been trying to get closer to him? Why had he gone through the effort?

What did Lupin *want* with him?

Lupin had his uses no doubt, not only his immense wealth of information and the kind personality and aura around him managed to soothe Adrian's temper on occasion.

The fact he was a *werewolf* was just an added bonus.

But what would Lupin *want?* There had to be an ulterior motive behind his actions.

Was it possible Lupin somehow connected the dots between who Adrian was? That he somehow linked Adrian's entirely different appearance to the small scared little boy who just wanted to go to an expo?

With Suzie suddenly in Slytherin and poking around where she shouldn't, the added stress of Lupin figuring out who he was would be too much.

Not to mention he still needed to investigate the Dementors, establish contact for the Azkaban break-out, *and* pass his final exams. He needed to prove Skylar Potter wrong with a higher Defence exam score.

His desire to perform better sent him into a haze of studying and reading. Wrapped up in a blanket stolen from his bed, he read the thick Defence textbook in dark sleepwear in the public common room.

"Comfortable?" A smooth eloquent voice asked, voice thick with the disgust Adrian always received when wearing sleepwear.

"Your discomfort is my comfort," Adrian responded absentmindedly, belatedly realising who it was actually talking to him. "*Oh,* over your tantrum then?"

Daphne's exterior frosted over, "Done antagonizing my first year?"

Adrian's face twitched against his will.

"Careful there, Selwyn," Daphne warned, walking slowly around the couch to sit daintily on the far side of the one he sprawled across, "those facial tics of yours give you away."

"I don't *have* facial tics." Adrian scowled.

Daphne smiled thinly, "Of course. You know, I was wondering what type your snake is. I've never seen one like it before."

Adrian eyed her suspiciously, "Considering you don't even know his name, your sudden interest is suspicious."

Daphne laughed gently, perfectly; it was posed and practiced too well, "Oh I've always liked him. He's gorgeous, such pretty black scales. He must have cost a fortune."

'She's digging' A voice whispered wearily, *'She's looking for something.'*

"If you enjoy him so much, why don't you look for him?" Adrian asked, waving his hand to the open room, "He's around here somewhere."

"You just let him loose?" Daphne's face tightened, "that seems...dangerous."

So she was still afraid of Lutain after he had lunged at Suzie with lethal intent.

"Don't upset him," Adrian advised, "He understands English."

"If he has your temper, you should keep him caged at all times." Daphne thinly stated, "For everyone's safety."

Adrian smiled, "Why, was that a threat, Greengrass?"

Daphne stared, her blue eyes watched him carefully. She would have done well in Ravenclaw.

"Selwyn," Daphne leant forward, crossing her leg to subconsciously alter her entire presence, "I was speaking with Millicent the other day-"

"That must have been strenuous."

"-and she told me the most *fascinating* thing." Daphne paused, "How she believed that you were adopted-"

"Oh not that bloody mess again," Adrian sighed, closing his book pointedly and drawing his legs up into a more professional position, "Greengrass, if you have nothing to do but spread around rumors that circulated in our first year-"

"The man in your boggart was your birth father," Daphne smoothly covered, silencing Adrian's protesting words, "*or,* a blood adoption."

'Humor her,' The voice whispered, soothing tendrils to calm his anxiety.

"So now it's a blood adoption?" Adrian spoke, somehow, *thank Merlin*, his voice didn't tremble. "What's next, I'm half veela? A vampire? A daywalker?"

Daphne frowned, "Things about you don't add up, Selwyn."

"Just the way I like it," Adrian sighed, "If you're *that* interested, cough up the galleons. Then we'll talk."

"No," Daphne spoke, rising to her feet smoothly to look down at Adrian. Her eyes were suspicious and sharp, her mouth turned downwards in a small frown.

Adrian arched his eyebrow, toxic green eyes nearly glowing in the green light of the room. His face was broken with a careful smile, an insufferable one which gave the viewer the urge to smack him right in the face; it was obviously a taunt but never with words.

"Am I the only one who seems to realize that your deals aren't just for galleons?" Daphne asked softly, "You get just as much out of it as whoever asks for help."

Adrian shrugged, reaching for his book again, "It gives me assurance."

"It taints your *name."*

"Honestly, Greengrass," Adrian snorted, "Do you *really* think names matter *that much?"*

Her jaw twitched falling for the bait. Then she smiled, a victorious look with a self gratified fire burning in her eyes, silvery-blue like unicorn blood.

"Thank you Adrian," She smiled, voice like fae's bells, "you've just told me you aren't a pureblood."

She sauntered away, leaving Adrian staring at her in shock.

"What." he breathed, unable to react until the cornsilk haired girl had left his eyesight.

"Well, that was fun." Lutain hissed, sliding his way out from under the couch, *"More fun than scaring humans. You were tricked like rat-man and Nagini."*

"*Never* call me Wormtail again," Adrian clipped hotly.

Lutain snickered to himself and slithered back under the couch to the safety of darkness.

Frozen

Chapter Summary

Where everything goes wrong, before it goes right.

The Dementors were swirling, conspiring in thick shrouded masses outside the windows.

Adrian could see them dance in his peripheral vision, startling students who sat nearest the windows with sudden bouts of frost and dread. An impressive fire had been charmed to blaze cheerily in all classrooms, dancing the shapes of phoenixes and unicorns running in and out of the smoke.

Aurors were more present, less to protect the populace and more to figure out why the Dementors had suddenly congregated at the school instead of the borders along the property. They still worked at Azkaban, at least a portion did, securing the prisoners and feeding on their faint tastes of hope and longing.

Perhaps that was why they were near Hogwarts, just beyond the wards of the castle. The hopes and aspirations of children would be as delightful as a suckling pig to a butcher.

"They're creepy," Draco muttered under his breath, sitting next to Adrian in Potions although not actually sharing his cauldron. Instead Adrian worked with Goyle, trying to save the potion as much as possible.

"I think they're beautiful," Adrian countered, slapping away Goyle's grubby fingers who were reaching for beetle eyes at the wrong time.

"Yeah but that's *you,"* Draco argued, deftly slicing poppy roots while instructing Crabbe how to stir the concoction, "I wouldn't be surprised if you had a taxidermy pixie collection at your home."

Adrian shot him a wounded look, "A *pixie collection?* If you're asking about my dragon claw collection-"

"What, no skulls?" Draco drawled, "Missing the pickled two headed baby squid in a jar?"

Adrian chuckled under his breath, shaking his head in amusement as he added in the beetle eyes Goyle had been pawing at the proper time.

"I wouldn't object to a dragon skull," Adrian mused, "*Especially* if it had been in battle."

"You mean with scales?" Draco asked with one eyebrow raised, "An Opaleye would be interesting."

Adrian hummed, pointing out how to stir the cauldron to Goyle as he started peeling hopping seed pods, "A live dragon would be even better."

"If they weren't illegal." Draco added with a frown, "I have a feeling you wouldn't follow the law anyways."

"What, me?" Adrian gaped in mock surprise, *"Never."*

They continued chatting, Draco offering animals that gradually grew more and more ridiculous. Adrian then named the proper living conditions or how he would contain it, or mount it on his wall. Potions class was let out, thankfully with no unfortunate accidents from Longbottom *or* Potter (Who managed to lose forty house points). They rose from the steps, heading out across the covered bridge towards Hagrid's hut where Care for Magical Creatures took place.

Dementors swooped in the air around them, kept out by a near invisible shimmering sheen like glossy fish scales.

Draco shivered, "I don't see how you find such monsters, *beautiful."*

Adrian frowned, "Look at them. They look so effortless, so powerful in the air." Adrian explained, eyes glazing as they danced in the air swooping down and up again, "They look like wind itself."

"More like a nightmare." Draco muttered, "If you like flying so much, why don't you just ride a broom? I'd take you flying again if you want."

A dementor looped in the air, its cloak trailing behind like elongated shadows of smoke.

"No," Adrian mused, not regulating his words, "I want to fly like that. Without a broom. Just the wind and your own body twisting in the air."

Draco laughed out loud, "Better luck riding a Griffon, you dolt."

Adrian smiled faintly, "Bet you ten galleons I'll do that too, someday."

Red sparks shot up from the rough area of Hagrid's hut, from the various pens and wooden fences along the side. Hagrid was nodding in the distance, talking to someone with unmistakable bushy hair.

"Oh look, your mudblood girlfriend." Draco sneered, causing Adrian to jolt.

"Excuse me?" Adrian blinked, "She's a Gryffindor snob along with a pushy bookworm. I despise the air she breathes."

Draco looked as if he had been struck, "Why do you hang out with her?"

Adrian blinked in bafflement, "I have debts to fulfill. Besides," He paused, smiling slightly in amusement, "She's friends with Potter. Never know when that will be handy."

Being close to Potter *would* be handy.

He'd be able to spy and-

Adrian exhaled in a single large rush of air, his eyes widened as slots of ideas slid together into a cohesive idea.

"Look, I've got to go," Adrian breathed, stepping backwards towards the castle.

"What?" Draco snapped, "No, *no,* you are not skipping Care-"

Adrian had already turned and bolted, running into the castle with determination in his steps.

He ran up the stairs, waiting impatiently for a specific moving stairwell. A group of upper year

Hufflepuffs shouted angrily for him to slow down.

Adrian first checked the classroom, swinging the door open to look in the quiet room. Dementors flicked beyond the high stained glass windows in the back.

"Selwyn?" A baffled but obnoxious voice questioned, curiosity thick like molten chocolate.

"Potter," Adrian monotonously responded, pausing to form a pleasant smile as he observed the Gryffindor boy, "What might you be doing here?"

"Er," Skylar blinked, eyes half hidden behind mousy bangs. His rounded cherub looking face looked cursable, "Remus wanted me to get his lesson plan for tomorrow-"

"Remus?" Adrian asked dryly, "Really feeding out of your teacher's palms, aren't you."

Skylar blushed, then flushed angrily.

"I don't know why Hermione likes you!" He blurted suddenly, "You're always so rude-"

"But I'm *helpful."* Adrian sniped out cockily, "Much more than you are."

"You snake faced-"

Adrian snorted at the insult. His father may be, but thankfully he hadn't inherited those genes.

"Is he in his quarters?" Adrian asked, already walking to Lupin's desk to grab the lesson plans in question, "I'll take them to him."

"*You-"* Skylar started to question before pausing abruptly, "Aren't you supposed to be in Care right now?"

"Aren't you?"

"I'm on-" Skylar winced suddenly, "Official Saviour business-"

Adrian tilted his head back and *laughed,* "Oh Merlin," He wheezed, nearly crying at the ridiculousness of it, "Is that *really* what you're telling people?" He gagged, inhaling too quickly for his lungs to accomodate, "Oh, no wonder you're the joke of the Wizarding World."

"I am *not!"* Skylar shouted, flushing up to his ears in embarrassment, "I really am doing important-"

"Listen here, Potter." Adrian's smile became wickedly sharp, "You may think you know what you're doing, but in this castle, ***I'm*** the one, who's one step up."

Skylar frowned and looked ready to punch Adrian in the face.

"You're not the boss of me." Skylar prickled, nearly sending spittle on Adrian's face. Skylar was in an unusually grumpy mood, generally he wasn't this easy to rile up.

"No, I'm not." Adrian agreed, "But remember that when the time comes for *you* to need information or help, I have blackmail or dues for nearly everyone in this castle."

Adrian's eyes nearly glowed, "And that's something even *you,* Golden boy, *don't have."*

He shoved past Skylar, taking great satisfaction with how his bony shoulder clipped the other's.

"Professor?" Adrian asked politely, elevating his voice to speak through the door, "Professor Lupin?"

The door opened slowly, revealing a sickly looking man who was still unmistakable.

"You look terrible." Adrian blinked, ever so blunt with his observation.

Lupin still looked baffled, stepping back to allow the door to open further, "Mr. Selwyn, why are you-"

"You're having Skylar Potter do your errands?" Adrian arched one eyebrow, "*Really?"*

Lupin blinked, large bags under his bright golden eyes, like melted galleons, "Don't you have class?"

Adrian ignored it and walked further into the room, stumbling as he slammed into the strong smell of incense in the air.

"Mr. Selwyn, I feel morally obliged to send you back to your class-"

Adrian sighed audibly, "I have your lesson plans, I'm more useful than Skylar."

Lupin smiled thinly, dropping onto the opposite chair with a small wince.

"Well, Skylar is a good boy-"

"Also your godson," Adrian pointed out, causing Lupin to frown.

"Mr. Selwyn, I'm not sure where you get this information-"

"I have a lot of good information," Adrian slyly added, "I'm sure you'd find it useful."

Lupin rolled his eyes with a strange fondness Adrian hadn't ever seen directed at him before.

"Well, I'll let you know next time I want to know the newest gossip wheel in the Slytherin house." Lupin smiled, "Maybe Professor Snape and I can discuss it over tea."

Adrian gave a bark of laughter at the thought.

"Anyways, thank you so much for delivering my lesson plans. I'm feeling a bit under the weather, I'm afraid I won't be able to teach tomorrow." Lupin apologized with a sincere expression of regret.

"I'm sure that Snape would like teaching for a day, since he can't get the position." Adrian blinked slowly, "The position is cursed, you know."

"It's such a strange expression considering real spellwork and curses exist." Lupin smiled, running one hand through his limp brown hair.

"Oh," Adrian blinked slowly, "It is cursed. The Dark Lord cursed it himself, only misfortune falls to those who attempt to teach more than a year."

Lupin froze, his hand stilling in his hair. He looked at Adrian with a sense of utter disbelief, "Mr. Selwyn where did you hear such a silly rumor-"

"I know a lot of things," Adrian swallowed, "Can you swear to me what I say won't leave the

room?"

"Mr. Selwyn-"

"Please?" Adrian paused, stomaching his pride to try and assume the persona of not his father's son. "Please, Remus?"

Remus melted like the paternal sap he was. "Of course, I swear what we talk about won't leave the room."

Adrian smiled, a gentle expression formed on Lupin's face. Adrian stomached his doubt, briefly wishing Lutain was with him to egg him on, "I know about the Order of the Phoenix."

"What?" Lupin jumped to his feet in alarm, "What are you-"

"I know a lot of things," Adrian added, "Things that a boy my age shouldn't. People overlook me," he pointedly stated, staring with all seriousness into Lupin's eyes, "*Bellatrix* underestimated me."

Lupin paled more than it seemed he possibly could with his complexion, "Mr. Selwyn exams are fast approaching, you should be better using your time-"

"The dementors are so close, Professor." Adrian spoke, lowering his voice to a whisper as he looked out of the nearest window, it was already getting dark out, "they're leaving Azkaban."

"Listen to me, Adrian," Remus Lupin growled, a low rumbling noise in his throat that was distinctly canine, "Bellatrix Lestrange cannot get out-"

"Students are whispering," Adrian pointed out, still gazing out the window, "They're saying things that Azkaban is going to fall."

A complete lie. Or perhaps it *was* truth, Adrian didn't know for sure.

Remus Lupin leaned back, rubbing his eyes and looking considerably worse off, "That's...Let me think on it, Mr. Selwyn-"

"If I'm helping you, you can call me Adrian." he pointed out, green eyes finally meeting gold, "anonymously of course."

Lupin smiled tightly, "This is dangerous work, Adrian."

Adrian smiled back, eyes sharp, "This is a dangerous world we live in, Professor."

The chill was rising with the moon. Adrian didn't have that much time, not to mention his detour to the Slytherin rooms to retrieve Lutain.

"We heading to the forest?" Lutain hissed eagerly, peering around and scenting the air as an early warning, *"Heading to Adalonda?"*

"Adalonda first," Adrian mumbled to himself, walking purposefully through the dark passageways of the castle. Paying the Weasley twins for the secret pathways was well worth it.

"Yes! The forest for demon-tears." Lutain cheered, purposefully messing with the word.

Adrian smiled and slid out into the washroom, opening the Chamber to slide down.

The Chamber was just as he left it, although it *had* been tidied slightly. The huge snake skin had been pushed out of the way, trampled by something roughly the same size.

"Adalonda?" Adrian shouted, his hisses reverberating oddly in the large room.

Ginny's skeleton was moved as well. Only her hair remained.

(Lutain had mentioned it to Adalonda, who moved it one day without further questions. Adrian hadn't seen it since.)

"Lutain?" A larger much deeper grumble sounded, echoing off the many pipes and statues, *"Cerestes?"*

That had been an argument in itself. Adalonda had quickly fallen into a mothering relationship with the two, constantly wrapping them under her coils like she was nesting a clutch. She refused to call Adrian by his name, instead falling into her self proclaimed tradition of naming serpents.

Adrian had absentmindedly mentioned his title was to be Cerestes, a mythological serpent which survived by disguises and ambushing; Adalonda instantly took to it, only calling Adrian that.

"We're here." Adrian responded, walking into the main chamber just as Adalonda finished slithering out of one of the massive pipes, *"Where were you?"*

"Swimming," Adalonda blinked, moving aside one of her many eyelids, *"Not long, helps with shed."* she explained briefly tilting her massive head to one side, *"You travel to the forest?"*

"Yes!" Lutain writhed eagerly, *"I will strike centaurs! I am faster now!"*

"You have shed many times since I slept last," Adalonda commented, *"You are nearly unseen, night-scales."*

Lutain wriggled excitedly.

"Which pipe exits in the Forbidden Forest?" Adrian asked, peering through the many twelve foot tubes.

"The Lost Forest is old," Adalonda tisked, *"Not forbidden, only Lost. This path, little Cerestes. Exits near clearing, but long have abandoned. Giant spiders flee, like worms."* Adalonda explained, pausing before making the oddest grunting noise.

"I make the hiss of a spider," Adalonda explained, looking as if she had done something obvious, *"It was accurate."*

"That was one of the worst impressions I've ever heard." Adrian added goodnaturedly, patting her side affectionately.

"Such rude hatchling," Adalonda huffed, peering at Lutain tiredly *"Does he always speak so rude."*

"I did not understand your hiss." Lutain confessed, *"Sounded like frog."*

"It did not!" Adalonda huffed, a smile in her voice, *"You all have leaves in ears."*

"I don't!" Adrian argued.

"I don't have ears!" Lutain argued as well, *"Your tongue is limp!"*

"His tongue is a fish!" Adalonda pointed out, flicking her own forked tongue for emphasis.

Adrian smiled and wrapped one arm a third around her neck in a quasi hug before climbing carefully into the dark tunnel.

"Lumos," He murmured, alighting his wand before turning back to the clouded eyes of Adalonda *"You be safe, okay?"*

"'Be safe'" She mimicked, tossing her head, *"You are one who awakens a sleeping queen without knowing what will happen! If anyone needs to 'be safe' it is you! My scales will fall out with stress!"* She ranted, *"Stay away from Centaurs! They are fast and will shoot you with arrows!"*

"I'll bite if they do!" Lutain boasted, causing Adalonda to huff in amusement.

"*We'll be safe,"* Adrian smiled, *"We're only going to offer a treaty to Dementors by giving them the soul of Hippogriffs."*

Adalonda blinked slowly, *"You're worse than Salazar."*

"We'll be back!" Lutain promised, darting into the tube ahead of Adrian, forcing the wizard to run after.

Ever so quickly the tube stretched off, leaving Adrian with the disorienting sound of his own feet echoing all around him.

"Master, what happens when we reach the forest?" Lutain asked, slithering quickly with the casted heating charm around his body, *"I can't bite dead."*

"Well you could, but they're already dead so it wouldn't do anything." Adrian pointed out, relishing in his parseltongue, *"I brought my cloak. I don't know where father got it, but I think the dementor material sewn into the bottom will help. It should keep them away."*

"Should?" Lutain picked up on the hesitancy, *"You have no idea do you."*

"I am entirely certain a portion of the time."

Lutain paused a second to comprehend what Adrian had said, *"You're as smart as a rock."*

Adrian blinked and scoffed, angling to the left and upwards slowly as the tube ramped up, *"That was rude. Should I use large words to confuse you?"*

"Master I think you are being very rude." Lutain spoke with a fluid eloquence that could only exist from practice, *"Nagini taught me that phrase,"*

"I wonder why she knows that so well." Adrian chuckled, recasting Lumos to carry on in the darkness of the pipe.

Adrian was starting to doubt if Adalonda had been right before the tube started to widen, creating a funneling opening in the ground near an uprooted tree. They stumbled out, crunching on stiff grass as before their eyes, the tube melted into the dirt.

"Open," Adrian tested, feeling relief as the depression slowly melted away into the opening of the funnel once again, *"Alright, Lutain you're up. Can you find the Hippogriffs?"*

"You could if you were serpent." Lutain slightly barbed, *"I could take you hunting!"*

Adrian snorted, *"You know I can't change into that. I'll need Wormtail to help me."*

"Then you can eat him!" Lutain cheered, *"He smells bad. You should eat him."*

"You know, you can't always just bite and eat people you don't like." Adrian noted, stepping over a branch and offering an arm for his friend to climb up. Lutain slithered up, only using it as a crutch to be dragged over the large log, then he was on the prowl once again.

"I can't?" Lutain asked in surprise, *"We always bite what we don't like. Or what scares us."* Lutain added afterwards, gazing off into the distance as if lost in thought.

"We never had so many words either. So many sounds and meanings..." Lutain mused, voice trailing off quietly.

"Serpents?" Adrian clarified, *"Do you like having more words?"*

"It's strange." Lutain added, shifting under a fern and out of sight for a moment, *"So many ways for saying what food wanted. Rat or mouse. Small or large."* Lutain huffed, *"I like words."*

Adrian smiled, *"It's nice to talk to you,"* he smiled, helping his friend over another log, lowering down a ravine carefully, *"Are you sure this is the right way?"*

"Are my scales black?" Lutain hissed in amusement, sliding up Adrian's leg before he got the message and lifted him to his throat, *"Horse-birds that way."*

"Horse-birds, right." Adrian nodded, *"Have you ever seen a horse before?"*

"Yes Master." Lutain hissed, peering around in the dark, *"Hatchling in strange house of many prey and predators."*

That was true, Lutain had come from a zoo.

"We are close." Lutain reported, uncoiling to allow Adrian to fish around in his expanded robe pocket to retrieve his cloak.

It fit him snugly, even through another robe than normal. The clasp clicked shut around his sternum, the edges flaring out like wings before settling gently around his legs.

"It's cold." Lutain complained, flicking his tongue at the off coloured grey tendrils at the bottom of the cloak, *"It smells sick."*

"That's how you know it works." Adrian smiled, pulling up his hood in one swift movement, activating the sticking charm interwoven with the fabric.

Lutain struggled to slither up the fabric, finding himself sliding down every time he tried to grip. *"Allow me,"* Adrian offered, gently grasping his friend around his midsection. Adrian distantly marveled over how large Lutain had grown, he must have been nearing four feet.

Lutain coiled snugly, gripping tightly around his neck. Amazingly, no matter how much Lutain tightened, the cloak didn't press against his throat.

Adrian spotted what looked like a wooden fence in the distance, as he drew closer he could identify it as the edge of Hagrid's pasture. Although the Hippogriffs could fly, Adrian had noticed they stuck to the pasture where they were for sure to be fed.

"There!" Lutain hissed, tugging towards the right with his body, *"I scent!"*

"Well I don't see anything." Adrian retorted, squinting in the distance, *"I know, I know, pathetic human eyes and all. Not everyone can smell body heat."*

"That's why you should shift into a serpent kind." Lutain smugly added, *"We wouldn't have this problem."*

Adrian chuckled at Lutain's words. He moved carefully, taking a few moments to jump the fence carefully. He slid his wand into his hand, stopping his lumos spell as he drew closer.

He spotted the first Hippogriff, standing in a strange mixture of hunkering into its wings and curling its cloven hooves under it.

"Now we need the dementors." Adrian muttered, peering off into the distance.

There was something wrong with it, something was tickling his neck the wrong way.

The clouds over the full moon dispersed and as soon as he saw the light, he realized why.

"Lutain," Adrian snapped, drawing his wand and hunkering into a defensive stance, *"Do you scent anything strange. Like a dog."*

"Never scented a dog before." Lutain cheekily replied, but obliged by tasting and scanning around repeatedly.

It was likely that Lupin wasn't even at Hogwarts anymore- he had even *seen* Lupin looking so terrible.

"Stupid, stupid!" He cursed to himself, scanning around in the bleary dark anxiously, "Let's just find the dementors. Can you smell them?"

"No," Lutain hissed, *"They fly near lake. Not big lake, small one."* Lutain instructed, looking over to the side.

Adrian faintly knew of a smaller lake, one that Unicorns went to for drinks and to bathe. Hagrid had spoken of the place, it seemed ironic that a place once full of light and hope had been pushed out by the non-living.

Adrian hurried off, running in a sprint. Once he found a dementor, he had to hope that a Patronus would show he was serious. Then he'd have to bring a Hippogriff to him- perhaps they just needed permission before feasting on a soul?

Adrian suspected Dementors worked on a system of permission and loyalty binds. They were neutral in alliance, only serving those who had the highest profit to did wonders to confirm his suspicions. Although Adrian could go and drag a Hippogriff all the way out, he really hoped he just had to formally grant permission.

He stopped, his heart fluttering in his throat, when he heard the lone howl of something larger than a wolf.

"Bollocks," Adrian gasped, looking at Lutain who had frozen in fear as well.

They were out in the middle of the Forbidden Forest with a werewolf on the loose.

Adrian rolled his shoulders, twisting his wrist and held his wand before him. He had in practice, learned many different spells to fight off magical creatures, although he hadn't ever executed them

against something. Practice was one thing, but actually performing?

He was hesitant to use his patronus now that Lupin was out and about, there was a chance that he could recognize it later.

"Let's go and get out of here." Lutain hissed, *"You do not stop the hunt if the prey is formidable."*

Adrian sighed but started running again, jumping over fallen trees and off mossy boulders when he could. He could hear the whispers in his ears, his breath drawing mist before his mouth, and he knew he was in the right place.

The lake was frozen, dementors dipping down low enough to brush against the lake and cool it once more. It was beautiful in its own way, the swirling pattern like a tornado of black, illuminated by the full moon.

Adrian walked out, trying to quell his hammering heart, watching the phantoms of reality dance before his eyes like a private show.

"Sonorus," Adrian cast with a sliding motion, pressing his wand to his throat to amplify the sound, "Dementors," He addressed, hoping his voice didn't warbel.

They spun, swooping to somehow curve around him, wrapping him in the center of the cyclone. The temperature dropped drastically, numbing his exposed fingers. The cloak appeared to neutralize the other effects, they seemed to realize it as well.

One swung forward, pausing just out of his grasp. It tilted its hood, creaking groans and gasping parted from what was its vocal chords. It reached out one hand, long and bony with scaled rotting skin flaking off.

"Dementors," Adrian addressed once again, "I come offering a token of peace, and a sample of what My Lord can offer."

It tilted its head, drawing closer with the grace of death itself.

"Master," Lutain shivered, tensing closer as the monster pressed nearer.

"There is a- a herd of Hippogriffs on the outer rim of this forest," Adrian stumbled, feeling his hands start to shake from the cold. His instincts crying at him to *get away-*

He wanted to reach out and touch it, to see if it's hand felt as it looked.

'Bestow them,' the voice whispered in his skull, *'A gift of gratitude.'*

"I bestow to you and your kind, a gift of gratitude and a-an offer, for future compliance with the D-Dark Lord Voldemort," Adrian started again, feeling lightheaded from the pressure of *so many monsters, so many beautiful creatures-*

It tilted its head as if considering. They swept back, bowing with arms extended in a circle around Adrian. The one in charge rattled loudly, it's cloaked hood seeming to lower as the bottomless black depths of…

Sound seemed to pulse slowly, even the feeling of Lutain drifted.

The black depths seemed closer, ever so close to Adrian. It swallowed him, the edges of his vision creeping black as his breath rattled hollowly.

It inhaled and Adrian felt so very *dizzy*...

"Expecto Patronum!"

And it was broken.

A shaky antelope bolted out across the ice, skittering playfully and dispersing the Dementors.

Adrian knew that shaky creature. He knew that creature and *why was this happening?*

"Potter!" Lutain hissed, who tucked himself to Adrian's neck, disguising himself better. Lutain seemed oblivious to the disorientation Adrian felt, how the very air itself stung and burned his lungs.

Adrian felt like teetering to the ground, he couldn't. Not when *somehow* Skylar had followed him.

How? How did *Skylar* follow him? He couldn't have, but the likelihood that the two of them would venture into the forest at the exact same time…

Where *was* Skylar, anyways?

And then Adrian saw. Across the pond, there were two people, laying in the grass exhausted and shivering. Looking worse for wear, shaking and trembling on the pond stones bordering the frozen pool.

"The female," Lutain warned, *"Potter's Den-mate."*

Hermione and Skylar were a shaking mess, the epitome of pathetic and lucky.

To make matters worse, a huge black dog barreled into the area, skittering across the ice with a yelp before crashing and sliding, it hit the bank as a man.

"Skylar! Hermione!" Sirius Black shouted, grabbing the two and pulling them to their feet, "Let's *move,* Moony's on his way and Prongs can only-"

Moony? *Prongs?*

The trees smashed open with the strange sight of a huge twelve point stag tossing its head, trying to warn back a humongous bipedal creature, short fur interspersed with pale silvery skin. Large gruesome scars and claw marks decorating its shoulder and face in a recognizing pattern...

Lupin.

"Move move!" Sirius shouted, scrambling back and pushing the kids behind him, "Run!" He shouted, jumping into a mid-air animagus transformation.

It was amazing, to see skin be replaced with fur in a smooth transition of wax melting on a candle burning too hotly. The stag- Prongs, Sirius had called it, bleated out an angry noise, stomping its hoof angrily. It was too intelligent for a normal animal, avoiding its prey thought process.

Lupin's golden eyes met Adrian's through the hooded cloak with the savagery of a wild animal.

The werewolf howled, a long single note that rang true through the trees and on the wind. The lonely sound of a wolf without its pack.

Adrian held his wand in front of him, and exhaled slowly.

This was no worse than Bellatrix.

This was no worse than his father.

'You have held your own against the Dark Lord,' he thought with an intoxicating softness, smoothing and depressing his anxiety, *'You can hold you own against a mindless beast.'*

He could. Adrian exhaled, and smiled.

The Werewolf jumped over the stag, its face pinching in violent intent. Its long hooked claws dug into the ice like hooks, pulling it across the surface towards Adrian before Sirius Black or the stag could redirect him.

"Master," Lutain warned, tensing close to his neck, *"I'm ready."*

Adrian shook his head, *"Let me,"* He hissed quietly, holding his wand in a dueling pose parallel to his jawbone.

His father could curse him, but a werewolf could *not.*

"Impedimenta," Adrian casted flawlessly, hitting the Werewolf in its chest right as it lifted its left arm to slash through Adrian's chest.

Adrian stepped to the side, exhaling softly as the slowing spell allowed him to duck under the werewolf, pointing his wand at the wolf's back, "Reducto."

The spell collided and blasted the wolf into a tree. It groaned, wood flaking off as the entire trunk shook under the weight of its impact.

"Good strike, Master." Lutain hissed excitedly, *"Black fur creature, behind you!"*

Adrian slashed his wand over his shoulder without looking, "Flagrate"

Fire spells always were Adrian's specialty, it was Black's fault that he jumped right into the fire line burning strongly in the air.

Black yelped, landing on the ground in a strange sprawl. The dog fur started to shift, receding; extinguishing the blaze.

Lupin growled and shook himself free from the tree. He lowered himself into a stalk, long claws dragging as he approached Adrian cautiously.

Black paused, then grimaced and resumed his canine form to combat the werewolf.

Adrian didn't need to watch Sirius, he had his best friend to do that for him.

"Behind!" Lutain warned, giving Adrian the split second needed to duck into a roll and send the Werewolf jumping over onto the yelping black dog. Adrian's side somersaulted over a large rock, sending a throbbing pain through his chest which would most likely bruise.

A stag tossed its head angrily, each of its prongs sharp in the moonlight.

Adrian cracked his neck and pointed his wand once again, this time at the stag instead of the canine dog fight.

The deer charged, the Werewolf jumped, and Adrian casted the strongest shield he knew he could

execute.

The deer recoiled from whiplash, snapping its head back with enough force it collapsed on the ground. Lupin slid down the shield, blinking in animal confusion before Adrian sent another blasting hex at the wolf, sending it skittering across the iced pond.

Lupin skittered, scrambling before his claws punctured the ice.

Adrian inhaled, and focused with a serene calmness.

Inhale.

The werewolf's lips pulled back into a silent snarl, long strands of saliva dripping from its maw as its gums twitched.

Pressure built behind Adrian's eyes, pinpointing like a thorn inside his ears digging deep, deep, *deep…*

Exhale.

The ice shifted, the water below bubbling unnaturally.

Crack.

Lupin froze, the hair on his back rising in instinctual fear as something was most definitely *wrong*.

The ice broke. Melted from a boiling fire.

Lupin fell through the ice with a high pitched yelping noise; Sirius Black instantly began to yelp in response, belly crawling across the broken ice to try and get to the shattered spot.

The stag jumped, shifting halfway through- it was an animagus like Adrian expected.

"Moony!" James Potter shouted, fumbling in his robe's pocket for something, likely his wand.

Adrian lifted his wand one more time, pointing it at James Potter's unprotected backside.

"James! Your back!" Sirius shouted suddenly human and still wiggling across the ice.

James spun, raising a shield just in time to stop a blasting curse.

"Get Moony! I'll take the Eater!" James hollered, spinning and shifting into a dueling stance.

Shite.

Adrian had dueled Bellatrix on multiple occasions, of course at that time the focus was to get Adrian to successfully cast a specific curse or spell in question. Dueling with his father was much harder, although those duels focused on Adrian's agility and ingenuity; he wouldn't ever be seriously hurt.

James Potter holding nothing back, he may be hurt.

He was out of his league.

"Stupify!"

"Protego!" Adrian summoned his shield, thankful again to his father for making sure he had

mastered it.

"Stupify!" James sent again, the curse was bright red and lit up the clearing, "Stupify!"

"Diffindo!" Adrian shouted, using the moment Potter dodged to hiss under his breath to Lutain, *"Dry bite!"*

"But Master! My venom!" Lutain complained, getting no response he grumbled but coiled in preparation to strike.

Lutain would *not* kill him.

Only Adrian would be granted that pleasure.

But for now, Adrian couldn't do that. He had to just bide his time and get *away.*

"James!" Sirius shouted, scrambling to try and levitate the thrashing howling werewolf out of the water, "I need help!"

"Hold on!" James shouted, wanting to help his friend.

"Accio, James Potter's robes," Adrian rushed hurriedly, swishing before stepping to the side as suddenly as a matador.

James Potter pinwheeled, trying to slow his speed.

He brushed nearly right next to Adrian.

Lutain struck- his body a single well oiled machine. Fangs as white as bone needles, piercing flesh...

James Potter shouted, scrambling back with his hands flashing to his neck- blood was pouring out at a dangerously fast pace.

Lutain hadn't- Lutain hadn't injected venom...

"Dry bite," Lutain assured, feeling his tension, *"Let's go. Adalonda awaits."*

Adrian paused, watching as James Potter collapsed, eyes wide and horrified. He paled, not from blood loss but from horror of the situation.

"James! James help me-"

"It bit me," James choked out, stumbling backwards, "I- A snake- A snake *bit me."*

A pause before more muffled swearing and a keening suffering werewolf still trapped in icy water.

"Let's go!" Lutain wailed, tugging towards the vague direction of the castle, *"Flee!"*

With how dark the night was, even with the full moon, Adrian doubted he could have found the recess in the ground that led back to Adalonda's cave. They would have to run for it, thankfully both Potter and Black were occupied, allowing him to slide back in the trees. There was still the chance that Hermione and Skylar was lingering in the woods- come to think of it, *why* were they out there anyways?

The moment he was hidden behind an ancient Oak, he took off in a loud sprint. Trees and fallen

leaves from the autumn crunched under his shoes; Adrian abandoned all attempts of stealth as he sprinted through the underbrush, occasionally running into reaching tree branches.

He wasn't sure how long he had been running, adrenaline pulsed through his deafening heartbeat. His legs burned yet he forced them to move faster- branches whipped at his face leaving him teary eyed and stinging.

The forest broke in a clean line- he had run off course from Hagrid's corral and ended up nearly out of sight. The castle of Hogwarts loomed high in the sky, looking something of mythology under the stars and moon.

"The Hippogriffs," Adrian strangled out, resisting the urge to vomit from his unexpected sprinting.

The plan was that Adrian would sneak back to Adalonda, informing her that the Hippogriffs had been sacrificed. She was the one adamant in making sure the bodies were not wasted. With how the night had turned into a disaster, Adrian doubted that was possible.

"Leave them," Lutain complained, making a sigh of defeat when he knew Adrian wouldn't listen anyways.

He lumbered across the uneven grass, his cloak snagging on a few small shrubs of scottish heather. The tendrils of Dementor's cloak were more durable, drifting over the branches like silk on skin. The rest of his cloak was the problem. Small barbs from prickly forest plants stuck around his hips, pieces of broken twigs and bark clung to his shoulders and arms.

He hobbled over, finally having his breathing under control. The wooden slats for the fence were frozen, decorated with the thinnest layer of frost.

The Hippogriffs were sprawled in odd positions; a normal person would assume them dead if not for the deep breathing and moving chest.

Adrian placed one foot on the lowest rung of the fence, already hiking himself up and over.

"Master! No." Lutain yelped, *"Master no! Back to the castle! Do not!"*

"Relax," Adrian mumbled, hopping onto the soft grass on the other side, *"I only want a feather."*

"A feather?" Lutain squawked, *"You risk our scales for a feather!"*

Adrian wisely didn't respond to his fuming familiar, and approached the nearest Hippogriff. Something mahogany brown with speckled feathers around its neck. Adrian reached out, pressing a hand to the warm fur by its flank. He could feel its heart, such a strong heart to send blood to the wings and its massive body, constrict and beat with a distracting calmness.

"Master! If you want feather, fine! But be fast!" Lutain hissed, flicking his tongue quickly, *"Not safe here."*

"Right," Adrian blinked, pulling his hand away as he walked up to the Hippogriff's giant wings, tugging at the primaries uselessly.

"Stop playing!"

"I'm trying! It won't come off!" Adrian complained, scowling at the beautiful speckled object as if it had offended him. He tried another, using his leg to hold the wing to the ground.

It came free with a cracking noise- he had pulled too hard and broken the bone. The bone had been weaker than Adrian expected.

"Look what you done!" Lutain hissed, his tail twitching in agitation, *"Broke it!"*

"It's already dead!" Adrian defended, holding the feather reverently in his hands, *"Completely worth it."*

"You're a worm," Lutain insulted, *"With a useless collection."*

"My collection is not useless!"

"Will you ask Adalonda for a fang?"

"Okay," Adrian paused, trying not to cave so easily,*"Do you know how amazing that would be? A real Basilisk fang?"*

"Master?"

"Yes, Lutain?"

"You're a worm."

Somehow through the anxiety and rapidly fading adrenaline, Adrian found it in himself to breathlessly laugh.

Breakout

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian is a bit confused, then gets more confused, and finds himself nearly laughing in Daphne's face

Chapter Notes

Thank you to my betas!
University has started! Hello frequent updates!

Lutain slithered down towards the Chamber before Adrian woke up. It was fortunate Lutain had thoroughly investigated all of the plumbing pipes with Adalonda's help, being able to slither to the chamber from nearly any washroom in the castle was surprisingly useful.

Adrian slept wonderfully, even after having to sneak into his own room so quietly as to not wake Theo.

Adrian was blissfully unaware up until the point where Theo doused him in icy water.

"Theodore!" Adrian gasped out, rolling out of the puddle on his bed onto the floor. He was fortunate to wear a shirt to sleep, it was easy to remove the icy fabric. Even more fortunate that Adrian had multiple spares, with how often he overslept or stayed in his room.

"That's what happens when you sleep in, well, more than usual." Theo noted casually, peering around the room curiously, "Where's your snake? Want me to leave the door open?"

It was a testament to how much Lutain had grown on Theo for the other boy to offer without another thought. The idea almost made Adrian smile.

"I'll do it when I leave," Adrian sighed absentmindedly, stretching and wincing. He still felt completely exhausted, he had been out way too long the night earlier. Then again, he generally *always* felt some level of exhaustion.

Although the one hippogriff feather would look beautiful in his room at home.

"What were you up to last night?" Theo asked, picking out his clothing for the day, "Didn't figure there was much left to do, since we're leaving soon."

Adrian grumbled but searched for his own clothing to change into, "I was just out."

Theo snorted but after checking that Adrian was decent, darted out of the room to meet up with Blaise.

Adrian fumbled with his shirt, buttoning it quickly and sliding on his thin robe.

The others were waiting, looking as prim and proper as they always did. Daphne clicked her tongue and cast the charm to fix bags under eyes, smiling the entire time. How polite of her.

They walked through the recognizable arches, up the steps towards the Great Hall. There was a suspicious lack of students up and about, especially considering it was the day before they departed for home. Generally students were making messes out by the front doors, the Weasley Twin's or Peeves' signatures on the walls.

They walked into the Great Hall, taken aback by the chaotic flurry of feathers and screeching birds.

"What-?" Pansy shrieked, fending off a grey owl which snapped at her harshly, "What happened?"

"Did the minister get assassinated or something?" Daphne sniffed, walking through the chaos as calm as ever. She took her seat, trying to flag down one of the Daily Prophet's owls.

Adrian frowned, looking for Hedwig in the flurry. He didn't see her, although he did spot one tall figure walking towards him with the Gryffindor Head of House.

"Oh no," Blaise reached for a piece of toast, "Look who's coming for you, Adrian."

That was strange, especially since it wasn't Snape, who generally took care of his students.

"Mr. Selwyn," Lupin's expression was pinched and waxy. He looked overall, completely *terrible,* "A moment of your time."

Adrian felt cold as ice once again, his irrational fear spiked and sent shivers down his arms.

'Calm down,' he forcibly thought to himself, exhaling harshly through his nose in one mighty gust.

"Professor," Daphne politely added, "Are you feeling unwell? Perhaps you should visit the Hospital Wing."

Lupin shook his head slightly, "I'm afraid that I really must insist, although I thank you for your concern. May I speak with you in private, Mr. Selwyn?"

Adrian blinked and nodded slowly. He stood- only for a large black eagle to plunge into the room with the viciousness of a vulture. It lunged, several tail feathers swaying haphazardly as they nearly shook loose.

Draco flinched, gaping at the bird in surprise and recognition. He didn't seem necessarily pleased, glancing around the Slytherin table in concern, as if the bird was for him.

Adrian knew that bird well. Although he had no idea *how* it was recovered, as far as Adrian knew it was taken in as contraband.

He also knew that the bird was *not* there for Draco.

Adrian extended one arm, allowing it to perch and dig its wicked talons into his arm. Adrian grunted slightly, the noise high pitched and nasally as a single bead of blood welled from where it's filthy talons dug. It snapped its beak, holding out one leg with a small amount of parchment tied to its scaled leg.

"That's..." Draco floundered, unable to process the bird perched on *Adrian's* arm. He quickly snatched a Daily Prophet from a first year, blurting out a random insult to have the younger student release the paper.

Draco jerked the paper open and froze; Pansy gasped in shock, reading the headline over Draco's shoulder.

"Oh. Oh Merlin," Theo blinked, looking horrified as he read the title, "Adrian..."

The bird shrieked impatiently as Adrian untied the parchment carefully. It was difficult to do so with one arm. It snapped, jerking and flying off unprompted with no intent to stay behind. Small wells of blood slowly trailed downwards from where the talons had dug in.

"Give me the paper," Adrian swallowed, holding a hand out for the newspaper. The rolled parchment was still trapped in his clenched fist.

Draco handed the Prophet over numbly.

Daphne folded one hand under her chin, watching Adrian's face attentively.

'MASSIVE-BREAKOUT-AT-AZKABAN.'

Oh.

Bella.

Adrian paused before politely and thinly smiling over his shoulder where Professor Lupin and the Head of Gryffindor house watched him concernedly.

"Professor, perhaps we should discuss whatever that was in your office."

Lupin nodded shortly, walking hurriedly out of the main hall with the obvious intent of readying his office for Adrian's arrival.

Bellatrix was out? Bellatrix had escaped Azkaban?

Were the Dementors around Hogwarts *because* they knew the attack was coming? Or did the attack occur simply because the Dementors were away?

Had his father somehow already conversed with the Dementors? Was that why he hadn't wanted Adrian to meet with the undead creatures at all?

Bellatrix was free, *his* Bella was free!

Adrian briefly spotted Neville Longbottom being consoled by Skylar and Hermione in the hallway- others were affected by it too, weren't they? Adrian had almost forgotten that other people knew Bellatrix.

Adrian hurried past, trying to ignore everyone and make the parchment in his grip seem unassuming. He spotted the werewolf waiting near a corner, shoulders shaking as he tried to compose himself. His instincts were likely still sharp with his recent transformation.

Adrian stepped up to stand besides Lupin and followed him silently until they arrived at the Professor's private quarters. With barely a pause, they stepped inside and closed the door.

The moment Lupin stepped through to his room, he sighed and sagged his shoulder as if tired from carrying an immense weight.

"You look terrible," Adrian announced, breaking the quiet.

Then, because Adrian was feeling incredibly bubbly and giddy, he added on almost humorously, "Rough night?"

Lupin shivered, "Something like that. I'm sure you've gathered that Bellatrix Lestrange has escaped from Azkaban?"

Right, Adrian had to look concerned.

Adrian nodded slowly, forcing the movement to look timid, "I figured that's why she was out. You-Know-Who would probably want her back... do you think that *he's* back?" Adrian widened his eyes forcefully, "Wouldn't that be a surprise for Skylar Potter."

Lupin paused, observing and staring at Adrian for a moment too long to be normal. He looked almost like he was evaluating him, scrutinizing his appearance.

Adrian wasn't...Adrian wasn't giving anything away though? Was there something telling, something he hadn't thought of?

"Let's not talk about Skylar," Lupin advised eventually, sinking into a plush chair, "Let's talk about you. I don't normally extend this offer, but I'd like you to know that you can owl me at any time over the summer."

Adrian blinked in surprise, "Pardon?"

"I'm worried that Bellatrix may attempt to meet you over the summer… if that happens, message me and I will personally escort you to a safer place."

What?

Oh Merlin, what had he *done?*

"You'd put me into protective custody?" Adrian's jaw dropped in shock, "But... the wards-"

"I can tune your owl into my house's wards, and into any place I'll be visiting." Lupin politely added, "Your owl is the gyrfalcon?"

"I- yes." Adrian blinked, trapped somewhere between dazed and baffled, "Her name is Hedwig."

"A wonderful name for a beautiful bird," Lupin wistfully added, eyes sparkling despite his gaunt and waxy looking skin, "And your familiar's name is Lutain, correct?"

Lupin was actually trying to remember the name of Adrian's friends?

Lupin was being *serious?*

Oh Bloody Hell, Adrian's father was going to *kill him* when he learned what a mess Adrian had made.

There was *no way* Dumbledore wasn't aware of this train wreck.

But… Lupin had said that Dumbledore was only aware of the so called 'Child abuse', which meant that perhaps the old man only knew that Adrian was in an *unhealthy household.*

It didn't necessarily mean that Dumbledore knew that he was living with *Bellatrix.*

And yet...Lupin's offer made sense, it was useful.

As much as Adrian didn't want to admit it, the man had a point. Adrian didn't know where he would be going once he got off the train. He didn't know which house was truly his anymore. Would Bella have a safe-house, or somewhere else she'd be living? Would he live with her, or would he stay with his father still? Would he be passed back and forth like some sort of pathetic muggle custody challenge?

"Also," Lupin spoke, his voice dragging Adrian out of his own thoughts. Lupin looked much more hesitant, as if he was fumbling with how to bring up a topic, "Are you… *certain* that your birth parents are deceased? My friend, James, or Professor Potter to you, he could search through the Ministry database if you recall your true birth name-"

Why would Lupin think that Adrian's *birth* parents would still be alive? Well, Adrian's surname that appeared on that damned charmed map *did* display Riddle. It sounded like a muggle surname, which *could* leave the impression Bellatrix was a cradle robber.

Actually, wasn't she?

Ah well, at least Adrian could tie up this loose end. As far as Adrian was concerned, his birth parents were long since dead to him.

"They're dead," Adrian's eyes darkened as once again his temper flared, tainting his tongue with an acrid flavour, "Do you know what that's like?"

Remus Lupin face pinched into a look so painfully haunted, it reminded Adrian of **t**hestral cries. The mournful sounds they gave when the milky eyes stared deep into your soul.

"I do," Remus admitted, his voice breathy like a sigh. The man paused, lifting his hands and rubbing his eyes.

"I- not many people know, but Skylar was born a twin."

Adrian froze, in horror.

What.

The.

Hell?

What was Lupin *doing?*

"Exactly," Lupin misinterpreted his horror as surprise, "His name was Harry, he was a wonderful boy, an *amazing* child," His voice cracked and he cut off with a sigh, "We were alarmed when he didn't attend Hogwarts... it was too dangerous to check in on him before then, too many Death Eaters were looking for revenge."

"The rumor, on the train when Skylar passed out." Adrian almost didn't hear his own voice.

"It was truth, Skylar *did* have a brother."

"What happened?" Adrian's mouth moved numbly, his words sounding fractured even to him.

"Bellatrix Lestrange," The name sounded like a curse from Lupin's mouth, his eyes flashed wolfishly, "She destroyed everything. She... we couldn't even find a body."

They had looked.

They had *looked* for *him.*

Oh Merlin, no wonder everyone was so shaken with Bellatrix being released, Skylar Potter must be filled with horror over the situation.

"I'm sorry," Adrian stiffly murmured, "Were you two...?"

"I was his Godfather; a rather ruddy one at that."

"It wasn't your fault," Adrian echoed, words that had been spoken to him such a long time ago.

Lupin looked up sharply, golden eyes narrowed as his nostrils flared in surprise. Adrian's pulse fluttered in his throat, "I'm not him. I'm not your godson, I don't know what you're doing, why you're so *interested* in me. I don't know, I just…" Adrian trailed off uncomfortably- why was his throat feeling so *tight?*

"It wasn't your fault but don't replace him with me." He coughed out, as if it was a bladed weapon that tore his throat apart.

"Of course I wouldn't," Lupin smiled somberly, the expression looking pained, "But I wouldn't want to see Bellatrix Lestrange tear apart someone else. "

There was something unspoken on the end of the sentence.

"I'd like that," Adrian blinked, not even aware of the words until after he had said it.

What was he *doing?*

Lupin smiled, a large grin that split from one side of his face to the other, "Thank you, Adrian."

"My name is Hadrianus," Adrian blurted, chewing on his lip thoughtfully, "Technically, Harry *is* a shortened version."

Lupin shook his head ever so slightly, "No, I think I'd prefer to call you Adrian, if you don't mind." His eyes softened and nearly shimmered, "I think you two would have gotten along well."

'I killed him,' Adrian wanted to blurt, *'I killed Harry Potter,'*

But he didn't.

He didn't know what he was doing either.

The Hogwarts Express chugged across the landscape.

"Think Nagini is bigger?" Lutain hummed curiously, peering out at the blur of the landscape, *"I've shed many."*

"I doubt it," Adrian sighed, staring at a page of a book and failing to read it properly. His mind was whirring too quickly with the thoughts of Bellatrix and Lupin. Even his father.

They were polar opposites, different ends of the spectrum. Bella was chaos in itself, Lupin was security and stability. His father was somewhere in between, something much more dangerous than a werewolf could ever be.

How was it that both his father *and* Lupin had taken such an interest in him? Lupin had only known

Adrian for a *year.* His father not much longer.

"There are sheep!" Lutain enthused, looking at the various pastures, *"So soft!"*

Sometimes it was the smallest things which made his familiar so happy.

"Did you know," Adrian started, closing his book and peering out the window as well, "That when sick, sheep will actually medicate themselves by eating specific herbs?"

"Clever sheep," Lutain confirmed, peering out as they passed another flock.

They exited the platform, taking time to lug down each trunk onto special carts and trolleys for transporting luggage. Wouldn't do for a Pureblood to lug around an owl cage.

Hedwig's cage rattled loudly, smacking into Lutain's special box. The snake in question was curled around his neck, scenting the surprising mixture of animals and people.

"There you are," Daphne Greengrass smoothly slid over to him. She wheeled her own trunks with the Greengrass crest over alongside Adrian's own collections. Her hair had been done up, styled nicely at the nape of her neck so as to not snag on the bags she had slung over her shoulder, "Oh, what a coincidence. I would love to meet your parents, Adrian."

Adrian scowled, she politely smiled in response.

"We simply must stay in touch over the holidays," her smile was predatory, "I'm eager to see you attend my summer gathering, Adrian."

"I doubt I'll-" Adrian paused when he felt the strangest tingle against the edges of his senses, a pulse of something decadent.

"What is it?" Daphne asked, peering through the mob of people, trying to see what had caught his attention.

Adrian's face split into a smile against his will, eyes widening in amusement and humor at the situation, "Oh, he *didn't.*"

Daphne eyed him oddly and confused.

Lord Voldemort himself was smoothly moving through the crowd, each step fluid and languid like a vampire. Nobody managed to touch him, most likely subtle repelling and notice-me-not charms on his cloak and high quality robes.

"Oh," Daphne blinked quickly, glancing between his father and Adrian with an almost disappointed expression, "Your resemblance is uncanny."

They'd have to change that somehow.

"Hello Adrian," his father calmly addressed, overlooking Daphne with disregard as if she were scenery. "I assume you have gathered all of your necessities."

"Of course, Father," Adrian responded shortly, it was easy to see where he inherited his tone of voice from.

His father placed one hand on his shoulder, twisting suddenly and violently to apparate away without ever acknowledging Daphne Greengrass.

Let her try to swallow *that* bit of information.

Splinch

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian finally masters Occlumancy, interacts with Bella, and splinches himself.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to my wonderful Beta's for all the hard work and help!
Please feel free to leave questions in your reviews, I'll check them out and answer any questions you have.

Thoughts drifted lazily in and out, each tangible until they melted, evaporating into the finest sand, blowing gently in a wind.

Every cloud, every solid surface bubbled and boiled when the scantest trace of touch drifted near its surface. It drifted, rippling and caressing each prod like smoke.

The intangible liquid condensed when out of prodding distance, forming into shrouded walls and blackened pillars. The illusion was disorienting, surrounded by oasis in a never-ending desert.

It was a snowfall of grey ash; pillars and walls constructed of fine dust and soot. Like a painting, the further you stood the more solid it appeared. Under close scrutiny it crumbled and faltered like sandstone under foot, leaving dust and unreadable powder with every step.

Memories disintegrated, whispering broken snatches of conversations into a meaningless blur of sensations and sounds.

The touch removed itself, the fluid serpentine body pulling away and out of Adrian's skull with near damaging force.

Adrian blinked, his eyes rolling back into focus as he rolled his shoulders tiredly.

"So?" Adrian cleared his throat, resisting the urge to rub his eyes with the palm of his hand.

His father's eyes narrowed, one hand tilting Adrian's head sideways with gentle fingers. Adrian could tell his father was sliding into his mind once again- absolutely seamlessly to the point Adrian couldn't even tell.

"It's unique," Voldemort stated eventually, his voice smooth and careful, "Defensive to the point of maddening."

Adrian felt a flare of pride, washing through his head to the core.

"Emotions aren't well disguised," Voldemort noted scoldingly, "They carry through stronger than distinct thoughts."

He was still in Adrian's head? He had broken eye contact, how was he-

"I'm the best legilimens in the world, child." Voldemort's red eyes glimmered in satisfaction, "I don't require sustained eye contact to read your thoughts, of course, only *I* am able."

Adrian sagged in relief, the last thing he needed was Dumbledore or his head of house to sneak through his mind even with broken eye contact.

"So I can help?" Adrian asked hopefully, crossing his legs carefully on his bed. It had been expanded with Adrian's growth spurt. He had easily grown a few inches taller in the last couple of weeks. Along with his height, his voice had begun to lose the childish quality, lowering into something smoother with occasionally horrifying cracks.

"You've placed yourself in a unique position," Voldemort admitted crossing one leg at his knee. He lifted his left hand to remove one stray hair which drifted in front of his face, "A valuable one, although risky considering your barriers were not yet cemented."

"They are now," Adrian grumbled, resisting the urge to cross his arms, "Lupin isn't a legilimens anyways."

"You couldn't have known," Voldemort retorted with one arched eyebrow, "Do not forget it was *my* influence which constructed your Occlumency."

Adrian blinked in genuine confusion for a split second, "I know. You're my father, I like that you can see inside my head."

Voldemort said nothing, he only blinked slowly and turned his head slightly. The light from Adrian's bedside lamp cast a shadow over his father's cheekbones, hollowing his jaw.

"You'll be training with Bellatrix once again," his father announced, "More difficult spells of course. Your magic is at it's swell, as such you will be trained accordingly."

"Darker magic?" Adrian asked, trying to hide the hope lifting in his voice. "Spells others won't know?"

"Or how to counter." his father noted with a slight glimmer, "You will be training with a follower of mine, Rowle. He will teach you Apparation."

"Apparation?" Adrian blinked quickly, trying to dispel the nervous tension, "Isn't that a complex skill?"

"Easier than the Animagus transformation, which you intend to master as well." Voldemort noted pointedly, wrinkling his nose slightly in disdain, "Apparation is more useful if you are to spy on the Order of the Phoenix."

"Can't we just use the mark?" Adrian asked hopefully, he really did want to master his Animagus transformation before attempting something as advanced as Apparation. He had heard horror stories about it from Rabastan- people splinched with legs protruding from their shoulders. One lady had died after leaving her lower half behind and showing up as only a torso.

"The mark is not useful for training or elaborate concepts," his father's voice was sharp. A small flare of throbbing in the back of Adrian's mind alerted him to his father's rising annoyance, "You *will* learn Apparation. I intend for you to participate in a raid, my announcement of my return. You will be using a portkey, but such failsafes cannot be relied upon forever."

"A raid?" Adrian straightened instantly, "An actual *raid?"*

Adrian had always *dreamed* of participating in a raid. Obviously he couldn't help with the minor spells and charms learned in his first year. Even the elaborate hexes that he spent *weeks* on wouldn't be enough to defeat an auror in a simple duel. His fight with James Potter just before the term ended was proof enough. It was dumb luck that Werewolves couldn't swim that had saved him and stopped the two aurors from chasing him down.

"After you practice with Bellatrix," Voldemort crooned back, eyes glinting brightly like rubies, "You will go with Nagini as a guide, she will protect you and let me know your whereabouts at all times."

Adrian huffed and swallowed down his protests- he didn't need *Nagini* to mother him and guide him around like a lost dog. He was much faster, he was already a much better spellcaster than Potter.

"The raid will take place on August 25, during the Quidditch World Cup." Voldemort continued, ignoring Adrian's stewing thoughts, "You will attend as a learning experience *only*."

Adrian wasn't a fan of quidditch, although the world cup was something Theo had been enthusing about since second year. Theo was excited, along with Draco that it would be hosted in England. Knowing Draco, he would likely already have seats reserved.

"What spells am I going to be taught?" Adrian leant forward, bracing his elbows on his knees, "The Unforgivables?"

"I learned those in my sixth year," Voldemort smoothly rebutted, frowning as he observed Adrian's face closely, "Those are still too advanced for you."

Adrian did not pout, although his cheek did twitch unwillingly.

"Unfortunately," Voldemort continued, sighing dramatically with displeasure, "You have inherited my looks significantly."

Adrian had hoped for that, although he only shared half of his father's genetics from the blood adoption potion, the fact he had taken it before he grew ingrained their shared features further. He didn't see it as a problem at all, he was *proud* to inherit the hair and the nose. A permanent reminder that Adrian existed as someone entirely new, someone who was a threat.

"I agree, you *are* a threat," Voldemort nodded, a small smirk twisting his thin lips as his eyes darkened lazily, "I would love to see the expression on the old fool's face if you were to age, untouched."

"What-" Adrian bit his tongue, growing silent as his father frowned in disapproval at his interruption.

"It's possible to place a minor glamour over you, shifting it to be permanent," Voldemort continued, clicking his tongue thoughtfully, "Of course extended exposure to that may indirectly affect your magic, and you already have such wonderful control."

Adrian flinched but stayed still as Voldemort snatched his head, long fingers curling around his jawline and chin, forcing it sharply to the side to see his profile.

"No, perhaps a natural illusion would alter your appearance appropriately," Voldemort hummed, "And you've created such a wonderful tale of dear abusive Bellatrix."

"What..." Adrian swallowed anxiously, feeling the beginning stirrings of fear in his stomach. "What do you mean?"

His father had a strange expression on his face, one glimmering with some sort of dark amusement. He reached out, gently shifting Adrian's hair until he could see the bone white mark on his up upper forehead, hidden always by his fringe. His scar, or at least the one his father had given him a very long time ago.

The long finger trailed over the slightly raised edge, more tangible than visible. It was in the shape of a lightning bolt, unique and something Adrian treasured.

His father's mouth quirked, as if he had realised something at the sight of his scar.

"I'm sure I can come up with something." He mused, twitching his finger so the nail sharply dug into his skin. Adrian didn't even flinch.

His father, like the sadist he was, immediately threw him into the dragon's cage to face the beast itself directly after the proclamation.

"Adrian!" Bellatrix shrieked, her hair much shorter than he was used to. It barely brushed her bony shoulders, "My baby!"

Adrian turned partially, taking the tackling hug with his shoulder knocking into her chest. It didn't prevent the long gnarled nails on her hands from digging into his upper arm, although it helped him protect his lungs and breathing from impact.

"I've missed you!" Bellatrix cooed, stroking his hair and *somehow* knotting the locks between her slightly shaking fingers, "You're so tall now!"

He had grown, although compared to his father he was still so short. Next to Bella, he realized he didn't need to look up at her nearly so far.

"Yes, I grew," Adrian spoke, the words awkward and stiff as he watched her for any violent movements, "That's what people tend to do."

She flung him away, curling her hands to her chest as she cackled loudly, eyes welling with delighted tears.

"They do!" She agreed enthusiastically, "Like a puppy!"

Adrian carefully pulled his wand from his sleeve, showing her his movements slowly so she wouldn't lunge at him. "Father said you were supposed to be showing me spells."

"He did?" She cocked her head the one side, eyes going blank before sharpening, "Oh! Yes! He did!"

Bellatrix never used to forget information like that, especially from her lord.

"Here," She chirped, flicking her wand in a movement Adrian dreaded seeing every morning. Cheery birds shot out, flapping in the air excitedly in mockery of Theo's inventive technique to rouse Adrian, "Target practice!"

"On *live* birds?" Adrian floundered, "Shouldn't we conjure a target first?"

She blinked and shook her head patronizing, "Oh *Adrian,* what's the point in learning *dark magic* if

you don't have some fun!"

She spun, pointing one shaking hand at a happy canary, she shouted something quickly, sending a white line of magic at the bird. Despite how her arm tremored, her aim was impeccable.

The bird shrieked, spasming and collapsing to the floor. It trembled, shaking as its feathers puffed unnaturally, its skin swelling as if it tangled with a stinging jellyfish.

"See!" Bellatrix cackled, "Much more fun with live things!"

"That was a stinging hex?" Adrian blinked quickly, trying to mentally process how fast events had unfolded, "you're teaching me a stinging hex?"

"Oh," She blinked, eyes blank once again, "Yes, *yes,* let's teach you that. Okay, it's Ictum. Cast it like *this-"* her tongue poked out as she jabbed her wand forward like a spear. She did it casually at Adrian's chest, not caring about how the movement had Adrian ready to shield at any sign of magic. Bellatrix seemed like she would curse him without thought.

She looked at him impatiently, and with a slow breath he relaxed and looked for a target.

"Okay," Adrian exhaled, pointing his wand at a carefree bluebird, "Ictum."

He didn't cast it, although it sent the strangest sensation up his arm, leaving him gasping in surprise at the feeling. It felt like he had briefly submerged his arm in water, sending feeling through his nerves.

"No no," She tutted, dancing forward and grabbing his arm to point it at the bird again, "Like you're stabbing out its eyes!"

Right, stabbing out its eye. He practiced the movement once, exhaling before casting loudly, "Ictum!"

A white light shot out, hitting the bird and causing it to falter. It was flapping with a limp, landing and preening at its feathers uncomfortably.

The strange sensation tingled up Adrian's arms once again- was this what dark magic felt like?

"Ictum," He tried again, jabbing forward and sending a considerably stronger jet of light. His nerves tingled and muscles twitched as the relaxing feeling of warmed water drifted up his arm, just above his elbow.

The bird shrieked, puffing dramatically and dropping to the floor.

"Yes! That's it!" Bellatrix laughed, "Stinging hex like a pesky stinging nettle."

It looked more like an allergic reaction, similar to the bite of an Urosting.

"Ictum," Adrian continued, reducing his volume into a determined flat tone. Twice more his arm tingled comfortably, causing him to frown when it receded.

Birds dropped to the floor around him, chirping somberly as wings were held in awkward positions.

"Here," Bellatrix coached, directing his aim at one of the birds on the ground, "Rumpervis! To pop pesky feather balls!"

Adrian hadn't ever heard of a spell to 'pop' feathers. Was it a spell used against feathered magical creatures?

"Rumpervis?" Adrian tested the word, rolling it on his tongue. Bellatrix nodded eagerly, pointing at the first Canary on the ground, "How do I cast it?"

"Like avis," Bellatrix innocently added, "It gets rid of them!"

Avis had a counter spell? Normally the birds just vanished back to wherever they were summoned after a period of time. It would be useful to know the counter spell, especially when Theo summoned a flock to pester him in the mornings.

"Rumpervis," Adrian casted, not expecting a dark corkscrewing spell to leave his wand. It twisted, purple on the very edge before it connected with the bird.

It circled it for a split second, making almost a net around its swollen body. It sunk, paused for a split second before the bird *exploded.*

Adrian stumbled backwards, tripping on the ground as a tiny splash of blood speckled his cheek. It was probably unnoticeable, yet the warm fluid felt like it had drenched his entire face.

Yellow feathers stuck to the ground in the sticky pile the bird had once been, its left wing had been blasted clear off and laid on the ground. One puffy Robin hopped over to it curiously.

"See?" Bellatrix cackled loudly, "Pops feather balls!"

"You should have told me that it *explodes birds!"* Adrian shouted back, scrambling upwards to pull out his wand once again, he hadn't been prepared to just *murder* an animal.

"It's more fun not to tell you," She laughed, "Rumpervis! Rumpervis!"

Two more birds exploded with small bangs, speckling blood on the startled Robin.

Adrian had just killed a *bird.*

Although, they were conjured. So it was likely that they never had existed, or were true to the word 'alive'. They were just targets, moving targets that had as much life as a stationary training dummy.

"Okay," Adrian breathed, standing shakily and pointing his wand at another bird, ignoring Bellatrix's massive grin, "Rumpervis."

The Robin hopped, looking flustered with one gigantic wing, then it cried out.

Pop

The blood made Adrian flinch, looking away while exhaling through his nose. His arm tingled like stinging hex, making his skin warm and relaxing his muscles. He could seriously see the use of casting magic like this- to ward off the cramping muscles he got after writing long essays.

"Feel it?" Bellatrix asked, breathing it out in a loud noisy sound, "The harder the magic, the better it is."

"The stinging hex is better," Adrian blinked, frowning as the warmth faded all too soon, "Does it last longer depending on the target?"

"Nope," she popped the P with her lips, painted in horrible lipstick, "The stronger the spell the

longer it lasts."

Adrian pointed his wand at a bird circling above them, "Ictum."

The spell was cast harder, the white light tinted almost blue around the edges. Adrian felt the sensation before it even hit the bird. He cast the dark bird popping spell before the bird hit the ground.

It felt nicer, like he had sprawled out with his arm on Nagini's basking rock.

He didn't even notice the bird pop.

He blinked, staring at his hand which displayed no external signs of the feeling. It was his magic itself thrumming in his skin, warming in his blood.

"What's next?" He asked Bella instantly.

She grinned.

The convenience with Adrian's new height, was that he could pass off as an adult when he wore robes.

Of course his entire wardrobe had to be adjusted, his special cloak was taken from him one day and returned the next with all new fabric.

Lutain had been spending more time with Nagini, at night they conversed and Lutain filled him in on the new techniques for scaring and his new lessons in human-building-navigation. Adrian thought it was all Griffon fodder until Lutain surprised him horribly by opening the door to the lavatory while he bathed.

What Lutain lacked in muscle and in size (although he was rather skilled at tightening around Adrian's throat if he said so himself), he made up in speed. With his black scales and stunning yellow belly, he and Nagini made it a contest to scare the living daylights out of Wormtail whenever they could.

Adrian had explicitly told the two that he still needed Wormtail for his animagus lessons, and they were *not* allowed to eat him or kill him.

Bellatrix's lessons continued on a daily schedule, although the intensity of the training varied by the injuries obtained. Adrian's father had a near constant supply of potions for injuries, Adrian suspected the man brewed them all himself. Although Voldemort hadn't ever actually stopped in to watch the training for himself, he seemed pleased by the evidence of the curses along Adrian's skin.

They had mostly stuck to various hexes and curses that were simple in complexity- Adrian could tell because the most satisfaction he received was warming tingles to his right shoulder. Regardless, they were able to do enough damage sticking to the basics. Slashing, blasting, melting, and cutting hexes were almost exclusively used.

Bellatrix managed to cross over the scar on Adrian's bicep with a curse, turning it into a perfect 'X'. Adrian managed to cut her hair even shorter. Considering how long it took for Adrian to heal, he considered it a win.

Once again, Adrian found his affinity with fire spells, able to shift them and cast them with relative

ease. Bellatrix mentioned how his Fiendfyre would be absolutely *beautiful.*

He wasn't allowed to start practicing magic that advanced, the only difficult piece of magic he was expected to learn was the one he was dreading.

Apparation was something Adrian genuinely expected to learn from his father. He assumed since it was a general mode of transport for most wizards and witches, it wouldn't take an extensive time to learn how to perform.

Rowle was one of his father's followers, therefore loyalty and duty bound to protect Adrian was well. It was a good decision, mostly because Adrian wondered if Bellatrix would have actually helped him if he splinched part of his leg on the other side of the room. Rowle apparently was *very* proficient with dark magic, as well as damaging charms. Bellatrix sighed almost dreamily as she explained how she once watched him cast four killing curses back to back.

If his father trusted the man, then Adrian would have to hope that he didn't mess up too badly.

"He's here!" Bellatrix squealed excitedly, skipping down the hall with Adrian's forearm in her gasp. "Oh, you're going to *love* him."

Adrian seriously doubted that.

Bellatrix swung open the door to the main dueling area, warded to prevent damage to the building's infrastructure. A smart decision considering how vicious Bellatrix got.

Rowle stood, wearing dark clothing with the signature white mask covering his face. His hair was short and blonde, more of a Northern European look than the Malfoy platinum. Sharp blue eyes pierced Adrian, as fierce as an eagle.

"Hello!" Bellatrix cried excitedly, jumping up and down with her robes billowing, "How have you been!"

Rowle's thin lips pinched into a polite smile, "How was Azkaban."

His voice was deep, rumbled with the faintest slur of an accent or a speech impediment.

Bellatrix threw her head back with a cackle, twisting her torso and nearly throwing Adrian with the sharpness of her movements, "Wonderful! So many crying idiots, begging for this or that. I almost *miss* it."

"Enough goading," Adrian clipped out, eyes looking at Rowle criticising, "I was told you're a proficient dueler."

Rowle tensed, his obvious muscles hunching as he flat out *ignored* Adrian, looking at Bellatrix instead. "What's with the kid?"

"Thorfinn!" Bellatrix gasped in shock, holding her hands to her chest in shock, "How rude!"

Rowle sniffed, "When did *you* get a kid?"

"I'm not Bellatrix's child," Adrian's voice was icy. He mentally chanted that this man would *not* attack him, no matter how intimidating he looked.

"Right," Rowle sighed impatiently, "I have things to do-"

"You're supposed to teach me Apparation," Adrian scowled, spitting the word like venom from his

mouth, "In two months at the latest."

Rowle's eyebrow lifted from behind the mask, "Two months, right. How old are you kid, fifteen?"

"Thirteen," Adrian scowled, pinching his expression sharply, "Fourteen in a month."

Rowle snorted loudly, a patronizing smile on his face, "Right, thanks for the laugh Bellatrix but-"

"Oh *Thorfinn,"* Bellatrix sweetly sighed, shaking her head sadly, "How upset our lord will be when he finds out you were so rude to his *heir."*

Rowle paused, looking at Adrian blankly.

Adrian rolled his shoulders with pointedly annoyed expression, "I need to perfect the Animagus transformation as well. The sooner we get this over with, the sooner I can get back to more important things."

Rowle opened his mouth, then clicked his jaw shut.

"Isn't he *precious?"* Bellatrix gushed, "I taught him everything he knows!"

"If that's true, Merlin save you." Rowle grimaced, pulling his mask off to reveal strong features and a thick jaw. He stashed it in his inner cloak pocket, offering one arm as thick as Adrian's leg, "You ever Side-apparate?"

"I have." Adrian admitted, "Father took me."

Rowle paused, "*Father,* right. Okay, well..." He coughed uncomfortably, "Let's hope you don't splinch yourself."

Adrian winced visibly, "Can't possibly be worse than Bella's curses."

Bella wriggled her fingers sweetly.

"Probably not," Rowle admitted gruffly, "Hope you're persistent."

Adrian grasped the arm, looping his own thinner limb through it like a hook, "I'm not lazy."

Adrian splinched himself so badly, his right foot was left on the other side of the room.

Bellatrix had the gall to *laugh.*

Rapture

Chapter Summary

> Where Adrian has tutoring sessions, practices magic unsupervised, and learns about a terrible not-good horrible bad plan.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rowle was a good teacher. He was calm, and didn't tire. It was convenient since Apparation was even harder for Adrian to perform than he anticipated.

Bellatrix didn't always watch, she often had other things to do. Rowle was given a special Portkey to the manor, and the privilege of freedom only in the main training room. On the rare occasions he saw another person, it was either Wormtail being chased by Nagini, or Rabastan delivering another shipment of illegal goods.

Rowle was professional in terms of never asking for information about his student.

Adrian almost suspected that the man doubted that he *was* the Dark Lord's Heir, until he saw Adrian deep in discussion with Nagini.

Lutain then terrified the man by moving across the floor faster than any curse, five feet of lethal intent.

"Got you!" Lutain crooned happily, displaying his fangs horrifyingly, *"you are not so fast."*

"That's because father would kill him if he cursed you," Adrian sighed, rubbing his eyes with his palm, "Leave him, he's my tutor."

"Shame he isn't as good as Nagini," Lutain sniffed, but retracted his imposing body obediently, *"we are well matched."*

Rowle swallowed nervously, blue eyes focused on Lutain's strikingly dark scales. "An impressive snake you have, young lord."

"Young lord?" Adrian quoted questioningly, blinking slowly as his familiar hissed laughingly, "That's a new one."

"Is it?" Rowle asked calmly, hands trembling as they clenched only air- not daring to draw his wand, "It baffles me others do not show you proper respect, my lord."

"Considering only you, and the Lestrange's know of my existence," Adrian stated boldly, drawing his wand and pointing it at Rowle innocently, "I don't have many to base my standards on."

Rowle nodded, not so much as blinking at the threat, "Then allow me to thank you for the generosity of your presence."

"You flatter me," Adrian drawled, lips pressed thinly together, "I know you're supposed to be

teaching me how to apparate. I want you to teach me a spell, or a curse. One that will be more useful than popping birds or tripping aurors."

"Hatchling," Nagini scolded, peering over at Adrian disapprovingly, *"You are to learn different magics."*

"I won't be of any help without knowing any useful spells" Adrian hissed in response, *"What point is learning Apparation when father already said he didn't think I could master it before the raid? I should at least know how to defend myself for a while."*

"You have our bite," Nagini's tail thrashed loudly, thumping heavily on the floor, *"That is all that is needed."*

"But I should know something- just the incantation," Adrian bartered, *"I'll practice it on my own. Just one day for the spell, then I can master it along with Apparation."*

Nagini looked unconvinced, *"You will practice with yourself?"*

"And I won't get far behind. Let me surprise father."

Nagini grumbled and looked at Lutain who was obviously waiting for her decision.

"Okay," Nagini huffed, *"But strong spell! Only for your safety!"*

Adrian smiled, nodding to Rowle who looked remarkably well composed for having witnessed an entire conversation in parseltongue.

"She agrees, and you won't be disobeying my father," Adrian translated with a small smile, "I want you to teach me a spell. Something for combat, something strong."

Rowle's face spread into a vicious grin, his pale eyes lightened considerably, "Oh? Dealing some damage, are we?"

Adrian's face didn't flicker, "Something brutal." *Something dark.*

Rowle paused in consideration, chewing his bottom lip thoughtfully. "What do you know about the Dark Arts, Ki- *my lord."*

Adrian almost smiled. He wondered how Draco would look if he was forced to address Adrian as such.

"Dark magic is a mutating form of magic, always adapting and changing. It's not defined or restricted by limits of power, or expressions of emotion." Adrian recited properly with near textbook definition, "I want something which cannot be countered easily."

Rowle grunted an affirmative, "Tell you what. I'll show you two; one for large scale attacks and one for single targets."

Adrian nodded, watching as two training dummies were conjured- not nearly as well constructed as Bellatrix's usual creations.

"Abrumpo!" Rowle hoarsely grunted, slashing his wand in a diagonal shape. A shimmering red line blasted out of his wand, glinting like a blade. It slashed deeply into the dummy, spilling its cotton and straw stuffing onto the floor.

Without giving Adrian enough time to register, Rowle was already moving onto the next dummy.

"Ruptura," Rowle spoke, sending a thin stream of purple fire searing through the air like a long rope attached to an arrow. It singed, burning through the cloth of the dummy with a clean move.

"How is the second one able to affect multiple people at once?" Adrian spoke calmly, ignoring how the purple heat singed his own skin.

To demonstrate, Rowle twisted his wrist, severing his wand's connection to the fire as it continued through the air like a dangerous ribbon.

"It'll exist for several minutes after being cast," Rowle explained with the smallest flicker of a smile, "And will continue to feed off of your own magic unless you consciously sever it."

The fire burned, moving faintly in the air with the grace of kelp in water.

"Alright," Adrian exhaled through his nose, "Abrumpo and Ruptura. I can remember that."

Rowle's eyes shined with some sort of sadistic humor, as if he wasn't telling Adrian all of the relevant information.

"Good," He smiled, lips pulling back in an expression Adrian couldn't decipher, "Apparation then?"

Dinner was always an uncomfortable situation, mostly because it never extended to involving people beyond Adrian and his father.

The table was a long piece of wood, lacquered darkly and covered with silvery plates with various foods. They were fancy, high quality ingredients set in an aesthetically pleasing shape by the house elves.

"How are your studies?" His father asked casually, more out of obligation than actual interest.

"Decent," Adrian responded politely, pausing as he buttered a roll with a dull knife, "Rowle is an adequate teacher."

His father arched one eyebrow and looked at him with an almost lazy ruby glance,
"Only *adequate?"*

Adrian gave a minor shrug, looking down at the bread in his hands.

"Don't shrug, it's unbecoming," his father scolded without looking up from his food, "I had assumed that his personality would prompt you to master the techniques faster."

"He's…" Adrian paused, thinking carefully, "He's bold. Impressive endurance."

Voldemort gave a low hum of thought, slicing his own portion of meat into bite sized cubes with elaborate silver utensils. "He's loyal. I noticed you asked Rowle for advanced spellwork."

Adrian paused, "Did Nagini..."

"No," Red eyes glimmered, "You forget your mind is as open to me as it is yourself."

It wasn't like he was *hiding* his curiosity. Adrian didn't want to be pinned down by Hogwarts curriculum spellwork and charms. With a resource like Rowle at his disposal, Adrian would be an idiot to not take advantage of it.

"Unfortunately, although Rowle performs spells acceptably, he lacks the required knowledge on

theory itself." His father continued, plucking a ripe plum from a nearby plate. His knife split its skin effortlessly, sending darkly tinted juice over the metal.

"Magical theory?" Adrian paused tentatively, "Dark magic is a mutating form of magic, always adapting and changing. It's not defined or restricted by limits of power, or expressions of emotion."

What he said to Rowle suddenly sounded much less impressive when he was saying it to the Dark Lord.

"That book was created to address neutral magic and light magic," his father explained casually, "I recognize the phrase. Unfortunately misinterpretive for the content. Dark Magic feeds off of destructive emotions. Normally thought of as a loose term applicable to any spell whose intended effects are discomfort or death, it generally does not consider other emotional based magic."

Adrian paused thoughtfully, "Magic such as the Patronus charm then-"

"Is a derivative of dark magic which does not function in previously defined categories."

Adrian paused thoughtfully, "Dark magic is any magic which feeds off of emotional cues, and light magic is from intent itself?"

"There a considerable difference between 'intent' and outcome," Voldemort sighed, holding the sharpened knife with plum juice on the blade between two fingers, "If the intent behind one dark spell is lesser the damage will be reduced. If the intent behind a light spell is lesser, the spell will not perform."

With how Adrian's patronus could be conjured in the beginning depending on his level of emotion, it didn't fit in the category of light magic.

"Dark magic is considered dangerous," Voldemort continued with the smallest twist of amusement on his lips,"because our cores interpret strong emotions as pleasure."

"The more emotion required behind a spell, the nicer it feels?" Adrian simplified, staring transfixed at his father.

Voldemort sliced off another layer of the plum. It's juice was similar to blood dripping over his fingers. "Precisely."

Adrian shrugged on his cloak, pulling the hood up carefully just in case his father had late night visitors over. Adrian was not sure- although he knew that the residential wing and his training rooms were off limits to guests.

"Master?" Lutain asked groggily, eyes clearing as he awoke to Adrian's movements, *"Where are you going?"*

"To practice spells. Go back to sleep Lutain," Adrian hushed, pulling the covers back up to save whatever heat they still retained. Lutain grumbled something before drifting off into sleep once more.

Adrian smiled fondly at his familiar. It was still rather early in the morning. He'd have *hours* before Bellatrix or his father went looking for him.

He tiptoed out of his room, through the hallways carefully and down the stairs. He didn't encounter anything except one startled house elf, wearing a strange mixture of half a curtain and a woman's

hairnet.

He opened the door to his training room, activating the illuminating and protective wards with the keyword. The door closed behind him, sealing the protective barrier in place until he or someone else opened the door once again.

Adrian shrugged off the cloak, pulling out his preferred wand and smiling at it fondly. "Avis!"

Birds exploded from his wand- the magic was simple and he barely felt it tug on his senses. He repeated it twice, watching confused cardinals and doves roost above him on the wooden rafter beams.

He then drew two of the hay bags in the corner over to the center of the room, taking time to transfigure them into something humanoid. They barely resembled anything human, although he wasn't picky.

For having attempted and getting decently along in an Animagus transformation, he was rather rubbish at transfiguration.

Adrian breathed out, smiling slightly at the silence of the room. There was something comforting about practicing spells alone without an audience.

His magic tingled, boiling under his skin ready to be summoned in the air with flames. He didn't want that this time, this time he wanted to perfect the spells Rowle had shown him.

He didn't know anything about them to be honest, he had not even heard of the incantation. Admittedly, it was possible that he had actually heard of the proper names, and forgotten about it from one of his many books.

He pointed his wand at the shoddy dummy, recalling the slashing curse he had seen. "Abrumpo!"

His wand fizzled, scrounging only the thinnest ripples of a spell. It traveled only a foot[1] before vanishing.

Adrian's entire hand felt numb, sparking with sensations entirely different than what Bellatrix had shown him. "Whoa," He breathed excitedly, feeling shivers twist down his spine and shake his body against his will.

He positioned his wand at the ready, focusing on his emotions which generally ran a bit stronger than others already. "Abrumpo!"

This time the spell worked, sliding through the air as thin as a razor, not the desired thickness of a sword's blade. It sliced through the thin canvas layer of the dummy, puckering and revealing the smallest hint of hay.

The tingles zapped up and through Adrian's body like an electric shock. He made a strange keening noise, his spine spasming against the most *wonderful* feeling...

"Abrumpo!" Adrian casted again, slashing faster through the air. "Abrumpo!"

Unlike the other spells, the sensation didn't vanish. It built and built slowly until all of his nerves were alive, popping and sizzling like the muggle candy he tasted once as a child.

His blood was *electric,* and it was one of the best things he had ever felt.

He gasped, stumbling upright- when had he been lying on the floor? The birds circling above were looking at him curiously, chirping happily.

The dummy was *obliterated,* shredded like a manticore's nest. How many times had he cast the spell to achieve that effect?

No wonder Rowle seemed so amused when he displayed the spells, he knew how *amazing* it was.

Adrian rolled, stumbling to his knees. His heart was pounding and adrenaline was causing his vision to blur.

"If only I knew *this,"* Adrian almost giggled, "When I was against Potter."

What about the other spell? Adrian had a natural affinity for fire, if it worked better than what he knew now, he may have found a formidable spell for combat.

He pointed his wand at the other dummy, still resting on his knees.

"Ruptora." Adrian pointed, pausing as nothing happened. "Ruptura?"

He felt something flare, his magic surging as the proper pronunciation made the difference. Already it seared, drawing a breathless smile to Adrian's already worn out body. "Ruptura!"

His wand flared, sending a hot whip of fire flying like Lutain's strike.

It came much easier to Adrian than the cutting curse. It washed through his blood like hot water, prickling through his nerves almost unbearably. It snapped outwards much stronger and more viciously than he had ever experienced.

Adrian's blood *burned.*

Bellatrix found him after the sun had risen. She cautiously pressed on the door, feeling the wards unlock and allow her to swing the hinge open.

"Adrian?" Bellatrix peered inside curious, "Are you *here?"*

She paused, observing the room with the vaguest sense of confusion. The air itself *crackled,* like static before a lightning strike. Shreds of cloth were scattered around the ground as if a feral dog had torn into scarecrows. The acrid stench of burnt hair was pungent in the air.

Adrian was trembling in the middle of the room, eyes wide and dilated to the point of no green. His entire body spasmed, looking to Bellatrix like one of the strange diseases people were afflicted with after the Cruciatus.

Had someone cursed Adrian in the night? Why would someone sneak in and leave him *alive?* Let alone in one of the training rooms.

Unless it was his father who had done it, although that felt counterproductive. Which meant the only reasonable suspect was Rowle.

"Adrian?" Bellatrix asked, walking over hurriedly through the straw and feathers. Her shoes were sticking in something congealed on the floor.

"Bella?" Adrian asked, his voice hoarse as his head wobbled unsteadily on his neck, "What are you- what are you doing here?" His teeth were tinged pinkish.

"It's noon." Bellatrix stated bluntly, cocking her head like a particularly curious owl "Where's Rowle? I'll kill him. *Please?*"

Adrian blinked sluggishly, as if on high strength pain potions, "Rowle? What... what did he do?"

"Didn't he curse you?" Bellatrix asked, voice trailing off awkwardly, articulating her confusion accurately.

"No- he..." Adrians eyes lit up, his pupils shrunk so amazingly quickly Bellatrix felt alarmed. A second later, his eyes were nothing but bright venomous green, a pinprick where his pupils were.

a strangely disconcerting grin spread across Adrian's normally relatively composed face, "Look- *look,"*

He brandished his wand, pointing it upwards and prattled out a spell so fast Bella almost couldn't understand it. Birds exploded outwards, but before she could marvel at how *many* there were- he had crooned out another spell that caused her to stare in surprise.

"Raptura," He hissed out, voice almost slurred and lethargic. His eyes nearly rolled up into his head as his entire body jerked at the spell, a fine tremor that was distinguishable from his constant shaking. The bright fire ribbon blasted upwards and cauterized the wings off of two birds, evaporating the blood and setting the feathers ablaze in one swift motion.

"You know the Lavcorpus curse?" Bellatrix stumbled over the name in surprise, "That's..."

Adrian shivered, entire body twitching as every nerve in his body was set ablaze.

"I know," Adrian moaned in satisfaction, "It's *wonderful."*

'This is bad,' Bellatrix thought distantly to herself, somewhat alarmed and somewhat proud *'This is very bad.'*

Adrian was still shaking- miniscule spasms wracking along his arms and legs. His skin itched and insects crawled under his flesh.

He walked, his cloak clasp digging into the sensitive skin of his throat. He couldn't bear to wear Lutain, even his familiar's pressuring coils made his body flair in pain.

He walked with the slightest limp, his hair hanging low on his face from his earlier exertion. His complexion was pale with his exhaustion, he was almost certain he had bags under his eyes as well.

It was embarrassing to walk to his father's study in such a state, knowing that his appearance would displease him.

"Are you sure you are not sick?" Lutain pestered once more, slithering slowly over the floor next to him, his bright yellow belly almost reflecting on the polished wood flooring.

"I'm fine, Lutain." Adrian muttered back, shaking and shivering, *"I overdid it."*

"Spells and spells," Lutain grumbled sourly, *"you should just become the noble kind already."*

"Animagus transformation isn't easy," Adrian sighed once again, wincing as his joints ached in pain, *"After I get Apparation down."*

"You always lose your legs," Lutain sighed wistfully, *"Always the legs."*

Adrian rolled his eyes but didn't deny it. He paused by the main door to the study, resting one hand on the wood before closing his eyes briefly.

He pushed the large door carefully, not sure of how heavy it was. The last thing he wanted was to slam it into the wall behind.

Adrian walked inside confidently, clasping his hands behind his back to hopefully hide the shake. The study was imposing, tall piles of books and elaborate bookshelves. Glowing stones and runes encircled the walls, strange objects hung from pegs nearest the door.

His father didn't look up, writing something attentively with a black fountain pen. Nagini did, her large head lifting from the corner of the desk where his father sat.

"Hatchling!" Nagini cried instantly, dropping her head to the floor with a mighty thud, *"What did you do! You have a sickness!"*

Adrian's father's head snapped up at the sound, red iris' widening slightly as he took in Adrian's appearance. His eyes stared at Adrian's face, seeing something new and surprising.

"Hello," Adrian spoke, clearing his throat uncomfortably from the hoarseness of it, "I- how may I be of assistance?"

His father stared for an uncomfortably long moment. Eventually he straightened his back, placing the black fountain pen down on his desk in its respective mount. He paused, tilting his head and looking at Adrian critically.

"You've ventured into more difficult spells," his father stated ambiguously, "Quite advanced, by the look of you."

Were they? In that case, it was entirely Rowle's fault. Which may have explained why he was so pleased with teaching him spells.

Advanced dark spells.

That load of dragon dung.

"I only wanted to impress you," Adrian spoke, his voice a slightly shaky murmur, "I wanted to be helpful."

"You would be helpful once you mastered Apparation."

Adrian shrunk back with a wince.

"Of course," Voldemort paused, tapping a finger to his lips thoughtfully, "This could be a solution to our current dilemma. Your appearance."

"I look like you?" Adrian spoke, his voice raising in pitch at the end so the fact in itself sounded like a question, "Are we going to establish a glamour? You said it would impede with my magic."

"It would," His father agreed, "Fortunately, the story you told the werewolf will work in our favour."

"Bellatrix?" Adrian tilted his head curiously, "how will Bellatrix change the way I look? You ah, you didn't explain before."

Voldemort smiled with the look of Nagini staring at a hopeless rabbit. Adrian swallowed thickly.

"She's going to nearly kill you," His father replied almost gleefully, folding his fingers delicately into the posture of a politician, "and you're going to have a *horrible* curse-scar."

Chapter End Notes

If you would like to have a visual aid for Adrian's scar (or the outcome), feel free to check out my Tumblr.
My username is Digitalta, and search the tags for this story, antithesis.
I'll have a link at the bottom of next chapter after you read about the injury!

Afflict

Chapter Summary

> Where Adrian is injured, Knockturn Alley is unsettling, and Lightning always strikes twice

Chapter Notes

> If you would like to see fanart, please click on the link at the very bottom of this chapter. It's easier to hyperlink it there, then to type out the URL here.

Remus Lupin was enjoying a cup of tea, listening to a headache inducing ramble as James and Sirius tried to explain to the group how they smuggled a live deer into Hogwarts as a cover for James' animagus form.

It was an elaborate story, one Remus regretted having been associated with. He had been indisposed at the time, and hadn't ever actually heard the story. He could only imagine Dumbledore's face when he realized it was a genuine wild deer.

"Oh James," Mrs. Weasley laughed, smacking him gently with a rolled newspaper, "I can hardly tell what's real and what isn't!"

"Yeah dad," Skylar laughed, a large grin lighting up his entire face, "Tell them about that time you took me flying and we found the flock of-"

"No no..." James quickly waved his hands, pointing at Lily, "That did *not* happen. Not at all."

Sirius leaned over and whispered loudly to the Weasleys, "I don't know this story, but
It *totally* happened."

"Yeah mate," Ron laughed, clapping Skylar on the back of his shoulder, "What about the story with the dragon-"

Skylar clapped a hand over Ron's mouth quickly. He grinned sheepishly to the steadily worrying Lily Potter.

"Skylar," She warned, "What is this about a drago-"

The conversation was broken by a unique loud shriek. The group jolted in surprise at the noise, not recognizing the cry. Mrs. Weasley quickly rushed towards the kitchen window, peering out quickly to try and spot the culprit.

A bird appeared, at first she had mistaken it for a Snowy Owl. It scrambled, long talons clawing grooves in the windowsill as it struggled to perch on the tiny lip. Its wings flared, flapping heavily to keep it aloft and balanced.

"Oh dear," Mrs. Weasley stumbled, hurriedly unlatching the window so the poor thing didn't have to struggle any longer. Once the glass swung open, the bird jolted and dove inside hawkishly, glaring fixed around the room.

"A letter?" Lily asked rhetorically, reaching out to stroke the sleek feathers on the bird's head. It snapped its hooked beak angrily, much more temperamental than an owl.

"There shouldn't be a bird here," James grimaced, watching it carefully as he drew his wand slowly, "The wards…"

"No no," Remus interrupted, looking tired and uncertain, "I... I must apologize. I spelled her a tracer to always find me, despite wards."

"You know it, Moony?" Sirius asked with a frown, blinking curiously before a large wolfish grin spread over his face, "*Oh,* Is it *that* kind of person?"

James gave a low whistle, Sirius wiggling his eyebrows suggestively on cue.

Remus blushed, choking before he composed himself.

Remus sighed fondly, standing to let the bird inside, "I'm afraid not, although I didn't expect a letter to be honest-"

He uncurled the parchment, a growing sense of dread grew as he noticed the parchment wasn't folded or rolled as carefully as Adrian Selwyn would roll it.

"Who is it, Moony?" James asked, walking up behind to peek over curiously, "A secret admirer? Some seventh year missing their professor?"

"Leave the man alone, James." Lily scolded, "Go set the table if you're so full of energy."

Sirius winced, "Walked right into that one, mate."

James rolled his eyes but obliged, throwing a funny face at Skylar who mimicked it right back.

Remus smiled, unfolding the parchment to look for words.

Lupin

The handwriting was unmistakable, but had a distinctly shaky style that was uncharacteristic.

Lupin's smile fell and his face must have conveyed something because quickly the chatter lowered and all eyes were on him.

I know you're probably busy. I don't know if this letter will find you. She's looking for me and she's going to find me.

I don't know where to go, she's angry.

It didn't need to be signed, Remus knew exactly who it was from.

"Remus," James spoke, clapping one hand on the man's shoulder, "Everything okay?"

"No I..." Remus sighed, one hand rubbing into his eye socket much harsher than he probably should, "James, Sirius, can I talk with you outside?"

The two exchanged looks. They stood and slipped outside through the back door, not saying anything.

"Moony," Remus paused in the doorway. He glanced over his shoulder, seeing Skylar, who was awkwardly shifting in his seat, "Is there something I can do?"

Remus smiled softly, "No, everything's okay. We'll be inside in a second."

Skylar hesitated but nodded, looking for Ron and vanishing up the stairs to where the other boy had gone.

Remus exhaled through his nose, passing through the door to meet with his two friends waiting anxiously outside.

"Alright," James crossed his arms, looking serious, "what's wrong?"

"A student of mine- or a past student," Remus rubbed his arm uncomfortably, "He sent me a letter."

Sirius didn't take the opportunity for an innuendo, which showed how serious they were taking the situation.

"What's wrong with the kid?" Sirius asked, bouncing on his heels, "..Is it a... ah….a furry little problem?"

Remus flinched, "Merlin I hope not. I think he's in trouble."

James frowned and licked his lips worriedly.

"What kind of trouble, Moony?"

Remus exhaled through his nose, "I need you to track the bird. Her name is Hedwig. Her owner may be injured."

"A student of yours may be injured?" Sirius looked at James unsure, "Alright, on it, Moony."

Sirius turned to peer inside. The bird flared its wings and threw itself onto the open window. Sirius flinched as her long talons chipped off a piece of painted wood.

The bird snapped its beak angrily, looking fierce at the two aurors.

Sirius waved his wand, pointing it at the bird and recited an incantation. A blue mist surrounded her, sinking under her feathers and casting her in a near invisible glow.

"Alright girl," James shoed with his hands, "Go home. Go back to whoever, we'll follow."

"Follow?" Sirius asked with an eyebrow raised, "Not sure bout you, but Moony doesn't fly, mate."

"I'll apparate back and tell you where we are," James promised Remus, "Padfoot and I will follow her."

Remus gave a slight nod, looking worried, "Probably smarter, they may be watching me. If you find him...*when,* when you find him. You, ah, you won't miss him, don't approach him. Get me instantly."

Sirius barked a disbelieving laugh, "What, they'll curse at my pretty face?"

"Yes." Remus deadpanned, causing James to snort uncomfortably, although the auror looked very cautious.

"Sure know how to pick 'em, Moony. Alright, we'll let you know when we find him."

Remus nodded, looking worried and back at the house, "Should I..."

"Eh, tell Lil's that its Auror business." James advised, "She'll understand."

"Good luck." Remus added thoughtfully, looking at the annoyed and preening Hedwig, "You may need it."

"What do you mean exactly, by 'nearly killing' me?" Adrian asked carefully, voice betraying his worry.

His father crossed his arm, face stony and expressionless. His red eyes, shadowed by the dark hair made his entire face seem that much more sinister.

"Your face needs to be disguised, any glamour or warding would be too easily detected by Dumbledore, no matter how subtle." his father explained, drawing the pale white wand, resembling exposed bone, "A possible disguise is by altering your very own features with a deformity."

Adrian nodded, his throat clogging and hysteria bubbling under his skin.

"People tend to look away from disfigurement. It'll help aid your story, as well as keep others from wanting to look too close."

His father leant forward, still so very tall to loom over Adrian. He pressed his wand to Adrian's jaw, just under his chin.

"I'm going to have Bellatrix cast a spell," he spoke gently, red eyes shimmering with a higher intelligence Adrian only hoped to match one day, "which will disfigure your features and disguise you enough to cast doubt over our resemblance. The effects of a curse scar will correlate to your untimely….*addiction."*

Adrian flinched, but sustained eye contact as Voldemort lowered the wand from pressing into his skin.

Adrian completely understood it- he would have agreed to it without a doubt if it wasn't for the implications. It would hurt, certainly so; it would disguise him and cast him in a specific lighting which would be pivotal with his role in the new war.

Bellatrix though... he had witnessed her lapse in sanity all too closely in the last month. Her moments of staring emotionlessly at inanimate objects, hysterical fits or sudden bouts of rage at random stretches of walls.

She would be able to cast a curse strong enough to scar, no doubt in his mind. He doubted if she would be able to do so without leaving him with lasting damage.

"I don't want Bellatrix," Adrian blurted suddenly, his hands shaking at his side as he suddenly second guessed his outburst. Red eyes observed him coldly, "I... I want you to cast it, father."

Surprise flitted across for a brief second. An amused smile pressed on thin lips, "*Me?* You crave pain?"

"I..." Adrian swallowed against the lump and bowed his head with silent prayer to fate itself, "I know that the spell will be performed successfully."

"Is that so?"

His father's shoes were silent on the floor. How had Adrian never noticed that before.

A bony hand tilted his chin upwards, framing the identical cheekbones and the wide eyes.

"I find it a shame," his father paused, "to impair such potential. It's unfortunate that this is so necessary.

Adrian swallowed, his throat moving under his father's hand, "I trust you."

The wand was pressed under his chin, alongside his throat nearest his right ear. Adrian's breathing sped up.

"This will hurt," his father deadpanned.

That was his only warning.

The white falcon was *fast;* almost too fast for James and Sirius to chase. It was only through their years of Quidditch and occasional recreational matches were they able to follow her fast banks and sudden unexpected dives. Sirius was suspecting that the bird was doing it just to make their life so much harder.

The two had cast charms to disguise their bodies as they flew over muggle populated towns. Sirius's teeth chattered against the wind chill as they flew towards the more occupied areas of London.

"Ay!" Sirius shouted over the wind, swooping over to fly alongside James although he was careful to keep the gyrfalcon in his eye sights at all times, "who is this kid?"

James grimaced, although it may have been the wind pulling at his lips and cheeks, "No clue, Padfoot!" he shouted over the wind.

The bird seemed to notice the shouting and disapproved of it. She took them on two sudden corkscrews, pulling up at the last moment to avoid smashing into a house.

"Bloody hell..." Sirius swore, twisting to avoid being tangled in a muggle telephone wire, "this bird is mental!"

James nodded, watching as it gave a loud cry of aggression, flapping its wings strongly to ascend once more into the sky.

James pulled out his wand, shaking wobbly on his broom. He double checked the tracing charm, making sure that the tracking charm was still working. He had a feeling he'd be needing a way to follow it once the sun started to set.

Adrian woke with a spasm and an unbecoming whimper slipping past bloodied lips.

"Adrian?" A low calm voice asked.

Adrian tried to open his eyes, wincing as his brain finally began to decipher the signals his body

was sending.

Every muscle hurt, they throbbed as if he had undergone a strenuous training exercise without any breaks. His heartbeat raced in his ears, the roar of blood just slightly louder than the irritating whistle that didn't seem ready to fade anytime soon.

"What..." Adrian coughed, instinctively curling and arching against the padding of his bed. His throat was on *fire.*

"Don't talk," *idiot,* went unsaid. His father trailed one hand over Adrian's face, tracing invisible patterns over his skin, "You entered a near seizure state. I detected no brain injury, however your body has suffered accordingly."

"Oh," Adrian croaked out, ignoring his father's advice completely. His hands and feet were in a near permanent state of tingling, as if they had fallen asleep, "Did it work?"

"It did," There was a pause, "You have sufficient disfiguration."

There was something admittedly sad in the way he said it. Voldemort hadn't wanted to actually do it, it was necessary. Adrian understood that. It was necessary.

"Good to hear," Adrian mumbled, the words sounding slurred together. He tilted his head, pressing his overheating cheek to the cold pillow, "Hedwig?"

"Already left hours ago with your letter. My wards alert me that she is returning to the predetermined location."

Adrian nodded ever so slightly against the pillow, barely conscious. "S'good."

There was a dip on his edge of the bed, just near his hip. A cold hand moved through his hair, pushing his bangs back to feel the skin of his forehead.

"You're warm," his father paused, "I've cast the countercurse for the spell. I can't administer any potions for the sake of our story."

"Bellatrix is a terrible mother," Adrian garbled into his pillow, his mouth twisting into an exhausted smile, "the worst."

"Oh absolutely," His father agreed with a sigh, "Although she has her uses."

Adrian made a unspecific sound of agreement.

He wasn't aware how much longer it was, but the next time he was completely lucid he was able to open his eyes.

The room was dark, illuminated by tasteful blue lights set in glass lamps. His bedroom was the same, although there was a suspicious lack of Lutain.

He moved, wincing as his entire body protested at the movement. Tears spilled from the corners of his eyes, over his cheeks which stung against the salt.

He moved his arm painstakingly slowly- blinking hurriedly to try and force his eyes to focus faster. It wasn't his imagination, feathery patterns of darker skin trailed down his arm towards his palm in an almost delicate pattern.

The door opened, throwing brighter white light into the dim room. Adrian winced and closed his

eyes as it assaulted his senses and brought his migraine to the forefront of his mind.

"I was able to treat your muscle exhaustion, although it is only temporary," His father spoke, sliding into the seat set up next to his bed. His pale skin looked archaic in the blue lighting, "Such spells can easily be dismissed as your own instinctive magic."

Red eyes watched carefully as Adrian shakily lifted his hand to his face, feeling the smooth skin questioningly, "What does it..."

"Increased levels of energy always seek to return to the Earth," Voldemort started, red eyes looking violet as they were engulfed by the slit pupil, "The scars across your body resemble that of lightning strikes."

Adrian almost frowned, "Like my one…?"

Voldemort's lips twisted into the rare displays of genuine humour, "That may have been an inspiration."

"You're awful," Adrian breathed, wincing as the loud ringing returned to his ears, they felt wet, "Now, now what?"

Voldemort peered out of a window to see the darkened outdoors, "Now you will continue with the plan and appear in an area of Knockturn alley for the wolf to find you."

"Right," Adrian coughed, hating the way his entire body twitched, "And I'll see you at

the Quidditch World Cup?"

"We will communicate the finer details as the time grows near," Voldemort's eyes flickered southward, pointedly looking at a spot below Adrian's collarbone. The tattoo he had would be able to bypass most wards and spells.

"Alright," Adrian wheezed, "Lutain-"

"Will be taken care of and tended to by Nagini," Voldemort rose slowly, his dark cloak made it near impossible to distinguish him from the walls of the room, "You will be unconscious until you are revived."

Probably for the best considering how his left leg was growing more numb over the course of the conversation.

"Stupify."

Adrian's body slumped limp against the bed once again.

The bird flew and soared over the darkened Victorian architecture just outside the muggle entrance to Diagon Alley. They flew themselves, just alongside the wards of the alley to the point where the postal service gateway enabled the Gyrfalcon to swoop through.

"Well," James Potter grimaced, "He's in Diagon."

"Bad luck, mate," Sirius winced, peering around the sky above, "I'll get Moony!"

Sirius then casually stood on his broom, throwing his arms out for balance. With a twist and a startlingly loud *snap!,* the man vanished and left the broom hovering aimlessly in the air.

James sighed and snatched the broom, shrinking it and stashing it in his inner robe pocket.

James turned and flew down towards the courtyard just outside of the Leaky Cauldron which publicly allowed brooms and other modes of transportation into the alley. James had barely landed and stashed his own broom when two resonating *snap!* popped right in his ear.

"Merlin!" James jumped, not expecting Sirius to clamp one hand on his shoulder, "Warn a bloke!"

"Never," Sirius grinned, looking at the faintly smiling werewolf alongside him, "Anyways, the bird vanished in the postal corridor for birds."

Remus nodded, "Let's check Knockturn. Do you know the local floo channels or the stores hooked up to the floo network?"

James' jaw dropped, "Wait, why do we have to go right to *Knockturn?"* James hung his shoulders, "you know I can't go down there, mate."

Sirius grinned, "No worries, Prongs. Just search around Diagon then! We'll handle the search and rescue!"

Remus tried to smile, although he still looked ridiculously worried, "Actually, James. You may want to keep mediwitches on standby. Just in case."

Sirius's smile fell, "The kid may be injured?"

Remus didn't say anything, instead he pulled his brown worn cloak further over his shoulders and took off further down the road.

Sirius glanced at James unsure before he looked around for any visitors. Sirius jogged towards a small storage room, slipping inside before running out as a large shaggy black dog. He sniffed a few spots, giving a playful bark at James before taking off after Remus.

James Potter sighed, looking around the entry point with a growing sense of unease.

According to the plan, Adrian shouldn't have woken up until Remus had found him.

Like everything in his life, his plan went out the window when he felt sharp claws digging into his side and trying to pull him further into an alley.

Adrian's eyes flickered open, vision foggy although he could recognize that ratty feathers and orange claws normally meant something had gone wrong.

He fumbled for his wand, feeling his body protest to the movement. The creature squawked, claws digging in deeper.

"Harpy," He rasped out with a glare, focusing singing flames to lick the flammable wings through his migraine. It *stung,* hurting his face and his skin as it flared through his blood. He gagged, as if suffocating or breathing water.

Flames sparked, the harpy shrieked and released him and hopping away leaping from one foot to the next.

Adrian groaned, rubbing the back of his head which pulsed so angrily. He felt like his gums were bleeding, aching sore through his teeth all the way to his bones and skull. His side was bleeding sluggishly, the harpy's claws were effective in puncturing his skin near his shoulder.

Adrian struggled to grab his wand, it having rolled a few feet just out of his grasp. Once he held the wood in his grip, his worry faded slightly although it did nothing for how his head *throbbed.*

Black spots danced in his vision as he struggled to right himself, pressing his shoulder and cheek to the cold stone of the nearest building. He was getting something slimy against his skin, stinging and aggravating the injury his father had made.

"Why didn't you bite it Lu-" Adrian cut himself off, suddenly overwhelmed by the crushing sensation of loneliness.

"Right," Adrian breathed slowly, the alley was unsettlingly quiet, "You're not here."

The ominous sounds of Knockturn suddenly sounded much more intimidating.

"Okay," Adrian breathed, stepping away from the stone wall. He cut off a choking sound as his entire body *burned.*

Remus would be on his way soon, Adrian just had to find his way back to the stop he was at before the Harpy found him. And fend off the curious vampires that would almost certainly be attracted to the smell of blood.

"One step at a time," Adrian mumbled to himself, taking a limping stumbling step out towards the main openway of the alleyway.

He figured he must have looked terrible. The few people he saw walking past only glancing at him briefly before they hurried down the path to wherever they were trying to go.

Adrian kept his wand on him at all time, clutched tightly in his shaking grip. An emaciated dog ran up to him, growling lowly and sniffing him from a distance.

"Go away," Adrian grunted, his face already numb along the left side and his vision tinting badly, "Go *away."* He snapped at the dog.

It paused, then snarled and took a closer step.

Adrian closed his eyes with a sigh, clutching the pipe he was holding to remain stable on his feet.

Lutain would comment about how if he was a noble kind, he could scare the dog with a single hiss.

He *was* a noble kind.

Adrian's eyes flashed open and his lips curled back in a feral hiss.

He waited one second, not feeling the shifting of bones or flesh. He almost sighed at how he failed his Animagus transformation *yet again,* but some of it must have transferred properly. That or he just looked scary. The dog stiffened, eyes widening and its tail tucking between its legs. It made a loud yip before running off suddenly.

Adrian's eyes stung like he forgot to blink for the longest time.

"You lost?" A low croaking voice asked, a man with vibrant purple eyes and translucent skin, "What is someone like *you* doing-"

"Go away," Adrian clipped sourly, blinking to try and removing the itchy feeling, "I'm fine."

The man chuckled lowly, smiling to reveal *two* rows of teeth, and what looked to be a black

tongue. "I don't think so..."

Adrian felt his magic prickle, surging beneath his skin but for some difficult reason, it was struggling to pull itself to the surface. Resilient and resisting, similar to the Fury only being singed.

He felt nauseous, like something was writhing in my stomach.

It reached out, it had an extra digit on its hand. If Adrian was thinking, or if he could through the pounding of his head, he could have named the exact species of the humanoid.

"Go away," Adrian warned, pointing his wand at the man, "Your last warning."

It didn't even blink, and Adrian hissed out the first curse that came to mind.

"Abrumpo!" Adrian hissed, gagging as the sudden surge of his magic at the movement.

Adrian slid to the ground, his legs too weak to support him. His eyes blurred, warmth and pleasant sparks illuminating his blood and permitting him to *relax.*

No, no he couldn't. It wasn't the time.

Yet, his blood sang and tickled, a contrasting feel against the stinging burn of his skin. His senses were flaring out in confusion, and he felt himself groan somewhere between bliss and agony.

Adrian panted, eyes barely able to focus as he saw the other creature collapse to the ground. It screamed inhuman angry shrieks as it fumbled across its chest to stop blue silvery blood from staining its clothing. He hit it then, good.

"Oh," Adrian slurred, smiling breathlessly as the euphoric sensations washed aside the pain of his skin, still leaving him twitching and spasming on the ground. "You're mermish."

The creature glugged angrily. Its bright eyes filled with fury, glazing through its savage blood loss. It reached out again, the extra digit on its hand suddenly made sense, it was a fin.

"You!" It gasped, its voice was wet and thick. "You- *you-"*

No, a mermish didn't make sense. Adrian blinked, barely aware he was talking out loud through the heavy feeling and the ringing in his ears, "A siren? Mermish don't eat humans."

It shrieked in anger, unhinging its second set of teeth to make a serrated cavern of hungry bone. It was kind of pretty.

A black dog slammed into the creature, knocking it to the ground where it had barely managed to rise. It glugged angrily, blood splashing onto the ground.

Had the dog from before come back?

Adrian finally was able to hear the other voices, the persistent horrified shouting that was growing closer.

Ah, no. It was a different dog, one that was big and shaggy and a startling shade of black.

Something popped in his ear, a bubble that had been blocking his hearing. The shouts suddenly made much more sense.

"Remus?" Adrian gasped, waving with one hand intently as the pleasant sensations of darker magic

and the pain really dimmed his thinking. "Remus? You..."

Hands coddled Adrian, searching over him with feather light touches. Golden eyes were wide in unmistakable horror as they took in Adrian's face, focusing on something below his eyes.

"Adrian," Remus sighed, looking on the verge of tears, "I'm *so sorry-"*

"Oh," Adrian blinked sluggishly, seeing a circling white spec in the sky above. "Hedwig found you?"

Sirius Black appeared, looking around carefully with his wand drawn. He kept his back to the two, leaving some semblance of privacy.

"Moony," Sirius grunted, scanning the road and the corpse, "That him?"

Remus exhaled shakily, pushing back Adrian's hair to look over his face and exposed skin better, "Yes- yeah. James has a few already- lemme send him notice." Sirius sent his wand moving, the shimmering fog of an obvious patronus shot out and vanished before Adrian could tell what it was.

"Adrian, i'm going to pick you up," Remus soothingly stated, although his voice shook. Remus reached out, carefully sliding his arms around Adrian with the gentlest touch.

"Sirius, do you know any numbing charms?"

"Yeah, one sec." Sirius grunted, casting a complex movement with an incantation Adrian didn't hear. "There, give it a few seconds."

Adrian groaned quietly in relief the moment his nerves stopped burning. He could feel the strong arms around him, barely more than firm pressure. They were moving, leaving the alley.

"Sirius Black?" Adrian asked, eyes rolling in his head from the combined pain and his magical exhaustion. His voice was flat, slurred and monotone.

"When did... when did you get here..."

Sirius paused as he deciphered the lisping sentence, taking it in stride and not drawing attention to how horrid Adrian's speech was.

"Right before that vampire was going to take a snack," Sirius grunted, scanning the surroundings with practiced ease, "So, good timing on my part."

"Oh," Adrian spoke, wincing as his head pounded from the sudden flash of sunlight, "Not a vampire, mermish."

Remus laughed slightly, it wasn't his normal laugh. Anxious and nearing hysterical, an attempt to dispel his nervous tension.

"That was a brutal hex there, kid." Sirius noted distantly, moving in stride to walk next to Remus and nearest Adrian's head.

"What spell was that? Not diffindo, that's way above you, unless old Dumbledore is driving slave labor."

"Oh," Adrian slurred, head starting to hang limply as his neck relaxed from supporting him, "Bella taught me."

Sirius froze, and Remus stiffened. Remus swallowed, his heart loud as Sirius scrambled to catch up a few strides, already hissing under his breath.

"Bella? *Bella?* As in *Bellatrix?* Moony, what the *f-"*

Remus glared, causing Sirius' jaw to click and a vessel to pump near his temple.

"Moony- you, this..." Sirius' shoulders slumped as he exhaled furiously, "Wait, you *knew?"*

"Sirius, can we talk about this later?" Remus muttered lowly under his breath, eyeing the curious people who were starting to watch them, either from Sirius' obvious indignation or Adrian's limp body.

"Oh no, I've been in too many dead ends to just let this *go."*

"He's injured." Remus harshly whispered back, gesturing with his head to Adrian's limp body. Adrian's face was twitching, spasming under his eye and twisting his features into some more garish.

"Wait-" Sirius floundered, nearly choking on saliva. "You mean *Bellatrix* did that?"

Remus shot Sirius a stern look, "Later, there are too many people."

Sirius swore, shaking his head before looking at Adrian with a sympathetic sigh, "Sorry kid, can we stun you? You'll wake up at St. Mungo's-"

"Please," Adrian gargled, his face twisting into a smile that was unsettling and somehow twisted all in one. Sirius felt his heart pound firmly, nearly leaping through his chest. Adrian looked bored, obviously in pain but somehow looking disinterested as if the entire situation was something lackluster.

Adrian lifted his hand, stiffly and with obvious effort; he stared at the unique darkened marks that snaked around his arm and hand like a whip of snowflakes.

"How bad is it?"

Sirius nearly tripped, and suddenly felt like vomiting on the cobblestone under his feet. "You haven't... you haven't seen it?"

Remus shuddered, the movement of his arms twitching traveled through his body and into Adrian's.

"It's...It's distinct." Remus struggled, looking as if he'd rather bite his tongue.

"Looks bloody awful, that's what it is." Sirius muttered darkly, "No worries, we'll get this sorted out. See you soon, pup, Stupify."

Adrian collapsed limply and heavily the moment the spell touched him. Remus had anticipated the sudden casting, and adjusted his weight accordingly.

Now it was just those two, cradling an unconscious child who looked like he had gone through some sort of squid attack

Sirius pulled the hood of his cloak up self consciously; the magical creatures and humanoids of Knockturn seemed fixated on watching the group.

"This place is giving me the creeps," Sirius confessed, jumping to avoid a puddle of questionable origin as they hurried on.

Remus glanced up and most likely saw something he didn't like. He hunkered lower, his body looming and curling over the unconscious body in his arms.

Something gave a shrieking laugh. Sirius snapped his head up, hair on his neck rising as he readied for a fight. Instead, he just spotted something perched on a roof, swinging its legs and grinning impishly at the two. It laughed again, sounding stunted and thrilled at the sight.

A woman on the street looked at them curiously, approaching them to pass by with a purple shawl over her hair. She smiled politely, not even glancing at Adrian.

Remus swallowed and didn't make eye contact. Sirius nearly tripped as the woman's eyes bled violet and her exposed chin puckered and popped out two insectoid barbs.

"Afternoon," She tittered, and Sirius coughed something illegible and hurried faster down the street.

They had almost a mile of confusing alleys and anti-apparition wards before they could breach the barriers and apparate Adrian to St. Mungos.

It was going to be a long trek.

Adrian woke up slowly with his body uncomfortably numb.

The room was too bright, too white, and smelled of something sterile instead of aged parchment and rosewood.

His eyes focused slowly. His arms cooperated in inching his body into an upright sitting position, although it took a moment for his limbs to cooperate.

There was a mirror directly across from him; the white light and the white robes he was dressed in made his pale skin seem even more fragile. He looked washed out, almost translucent.

The lights also made the unique scar patterning across his skin stand out starkly in shades of angry red and magenta.

Adrian lifted one hand, moving it to his cheek.

As if written by his father in his spidery penmanship, delicate lines decorated the hollow of his cheek and along the pronounced bone ridge of his cheekbone.

It looked like feathers were branded to his skin, pressed and seared there. The longer he looked, the less they resembled feathers.

Snowflakes, something organized yet chaotic. A burning touch of winter frost from where the electricity incinerated his flesh and cauterized the wound.

"Oh," Adrian breathed, touching the scarring where his entire body was numb. He pressed harder, digging his clipped fingernails into the marks until one blister ruptured and oozed over his flesh. He didn't feel it, he didn't feel pain.

It had worked, the spell had worked.

He didn't resemble his father anymore, yet, he still did. It was hard to see, difficult to recognize through the distracting colours.

Adrian grinned wide enough his face felt foreign. He breathed hurriedly, loud and excited.

It had *worked.*

He was *happy.*

Please click Here to be linked to my Tumblr where I post fanart of this story. Fanart is not chronological, and I use it mostly to help me determine the course of the plot. The contents of the link is simply a rough drawing I made of Adrian (side view) where I determined which type of disfigurement to use.

If you would like to see the damage or scars real people experience, please search Lichtenberg Figures, especially in reference to epithelial scarring.

Please note, that I have taken extreme liberties to make the scarring and damage much more extensive than most people are afflicted with. That being said, the patterns and the scars were picked due to the natural treatment and side effects people experience. That, and it's very ironic.

Balm

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian is released, is angry, and falls apart

Chapter Notes

Thanks to everyone who checked out the fanart. Feel free at any time to check in and see new pictures, or to make some of your own!

Adrian didn't understand why the Healers were so startled and wary of his answers.

They questioned him like he knew they would, and he responded according to the predetermined script he and his father had already created.

Yes, he had been living with his father. *Yes,* Bellatrix had shown up unexpectedly and kidnapped him so to speak.

With her lapse in sanity due to her imprisonment in Azkaban, the healers and mediwitches were being 'considerate' enough to not question him directly on the events leading up to the curse.

They had performed the counterspells, along with the nerve and muscle reconstruction spells. Unfortunately with the type of spells lightning curses were, and the act of cauterizing the skin itself, there was no chance to reverse the immense scarring; although they were able to lessen the angry red welts into more subtle red and purple scarring.

The scars altered the entire shape of his face- reducing the prominence of his cheekbones and casting the illusion of a more circular jaw. His green eyes popped eerily, more attention grabbing than his thin nose or familiar facial features.

It worked in all the best ways, and gave an excuse for why his body shook and trembled with the after effects of his dark magic splurging.

The Healers didn't like how he answered everything calmly and rationally. They didn't like how he didn't scream at night.

Then the mediwitch implied during one questioning, that perhaps Bellatrix had *abused* him in other ways.

Adrian had an outburst of anger, only partially fueled by the bone aching *need* that ran rampant in his blood. He had shouted, thrown his pillow and cursed vulgarities much more violently than a fourteen year old should have.

Remus, who was painfully awkward with children, made the entire thing slightly better by assisting Adrian with the first rehabilitation efforts once he awoke.

He was informed that both James Potter and Sirius Black visited him in the hospital, although Adrian sent them away instantly. They hadn't treated him well in his first year, they would be idiots to assume he didn't hold a grudge.

His nerves had been damaged severely- to the point the mediwitches doubted he would have complete control over his magic.

(Adrian mentally laughed and thanked his father for casting the curse himself, and not giving the task to Bellatrix)

Once the employees of St. Mungos were *absolutely certain* that he would be able to deal with any future rehabilitation efforts or medical procedures, he was signed for release.

He was discharged after four days, his wounds bandaged from where patches had blistered and were still interfering with his magical current.

From a lack of magical guardian, Adrian was taken care of by Remus who had used his title of Hogwarts Teacher as a temporary guardian.

Which, through a chain of events, led up to the single moment where Adrian was indulging himself by making up for his missed childhood.

Namely, by locking his door and refusing to come out.

"Adrian!" Remus shouted once again, the sound muffled by the weathered oak door, "Open this door! You haven't come out all day!"

Adrian rolled over on his bed, staring at the wall pensively. He stared at the cracks in the plaster until they blurred in his vision and created abstract pictures and faces.

Remus thumped once more- this one sounding significantly different. Adrian could well imagine the older man pressing his forehead to the door in a mixture of annoyance and exasperation.

"If you don't open this door," Remus paused in thought, "I'll ask James what to do."

Adrian snorted. Remus' sensitive hearing easily picked up the sound.

"Fine!" Remus argued back, scowling on the other side, "Maybe he'll bring Skylar!"

Adrian tensed. James Potter *wouldn't.*
He did.

Adrian heard the lighter feet of Skylar Potter running up the steps, running across the creaky wooden floor of Remus' shack of a house. If Adrian focused, he could hear the faint murmur of people talking down the hall in the main foyer.

Five fast knocks rattled Adrian's door, causing his teeth to itch and his hand twitch to pull his wand from under his pillow.

"Adrian!" Skylar Potter shouted, his voice had gotten deeper as well, "I... I know we're not friends but-"

Adrian couldn't help it, he *laughed.* It was a high pitched sound verging on hysteria, something completely acceptable for a boy tortured by a maniac.

"*Friends?"* Adrian echoed, barely aware of the hysterical tears that slipped from the corner of his

eye, "Skylar Potter, I *hate* you."

Skylar paused on the other side of the door, then leant his entire weight against it. He slid to the ground, dark shadow from under the door slit.

"C'mon mate," Skylar's voice was lighter, "Come on out and we can floo Hermione..."

Adrian grabbed the nearest thing he could see- a porcelain mug Remus had offered him hot chocolate in. He let it fly, crashing and shattering against the door. It suitably scared Skylar, who jolted away from the wood.

The sound attracted someone else, heavy footsteps of an adult and a faster speed than Remus.

"Skylar?" James' voice was unmistakable, even through the wood, "You alright?"

"Fine dad." Skylar assured him, "Was being a bit rude, my bad."

James paused, obviously not sure and well experience with Adrian's snark, "You sure?"

"Fine," Skylar's voice was bright and Adrian could tell he was smiling, "I've got this."

How could Skylar Potter be so inherently *good?*

Adrian jolted to his feet, toes stinging pins and needles from his seated position for such a long time. He stalked across the wood, ignoring its obvious creaking to warn the others that he was nearing the door.

Adrian grasped the handle and flung it open, deactivating its privacy ward. Skylar fumbled forward, nearly getting hit by the fast moving doorknob.

"Why," Adrian nearly growled out, glaring at the backside of Skylar, "Don't you leave me *alone?"*

Skylar held his hands out and turned slowly, his mouth opened obviously in an awkward attempt to peacefully fix the situation.

Adrian was taller; he had to look down at Skylar.

Skylar met Adrian's eyes, then his eyes wandered.

They widened, his mouth dropped into a small shape of expressive horror.

Adrian's jaw twitched, and Skylar watched transfixed how it stretched the painful purple scaring over his cheekbone.

"What..." Skylar cleared his throat, not sure of how hoarse it had gotten, "What happened…."

Adrian smiled a wicked grin, it made his face look terrifyingly sick.

"You mean your *dad,* didn't tell you?" Adrian almost crooned, his expression sending the hairs on Skylar's neck standing upright, "This was a welcome home gift."

Skylar's face expanded into horror once again. Adrian found he rather liked the power that emotion gave him.

Then it switched to pity, and Adrian temper flared like the angry maw of a Chinese Fireball. His magic didn't react, but his fist did. It was painfully muggle, and he had no practice with melee

combat to begin with; his knuckles cracked loudly and his thumb ground against his bone, threatening to snap. Skylar's jaw snapped to the side, but Adrian suspected he had done more damage to himself than to the Golden Boy.

Skylar gave a loud cry of pain, although it was mostly surprise. He fumbled to the ground, a jumble of gangly limbs he hadn't adjusted to yet.

Adrian fell with him, nursing his throbbing hand close to his face. Adrian noted the way Skylar paled when he saw the fine reddish blemishes continued down the back of his hand.

"Sweet Merlin," Skylar shuddered, hesitating before he cautiously pulled down on the neck of his shirt, stretching it beyond the point of return.

"I know it's not the same..." Skylar paused, tugging further to reveal the fine white scar directly over his heart, "but I have one too..."

Skylar thought that the tiny mark over his heart- a *flesh wound,* could dare compare to everything Adrian had endured?

Adrian saw *red.*

It was blur of movement and disorientation. Adrian couldn't hear- he couldn't *see.* He felt the stinging tingle of his scars itching, his magic boiling and tugging on the Keloid tissue in attempts to heal what could not be fixed.

Adrian's head snapped around when large hands and arms snagged him under his armpits, yanking him up off the ground and for a split second, he was entirely weightless.

Then he crashed to the ground, skidding across wooden floor as sensations returned quickly.

"-rian!"

Adrian blinked, stumbling backwards on his elbows as he clumsily tried to get to his feet- struggling at how his body *stung.*

"Adrian!" Remus tried again, relief spreading across his face briefly, "Thank Merlin; I don't know what happened but your curse scar activated..."

"What?" Adrian asked dumbly, looking past the werewolf where Skylar was sporting a large burn across the bridge of his nose and cheekbone, narrowly missing his eye. James was holding him securely, face stony with the professionalism of auror's having seen this before.

"A curse scar," Remus explained, lowering himself to kneel on one knee and soften his voice, "When very dark magic is used, often it leaves behind scars which can temporarily manifest similar magic to what was cast. Didn't the healers talk to you?"

James nodded stiffly, "Assuming your curse was the lightning curse, it was activated by whatever Skylar said or whatever you felt."

"Dad," Skylar urged, knocking aside James' wand with a small pout, "It was me. I showed him my own scar-"

"You *what?"* James gaped, "Skylar Charlus *Potter,* you *know* the risks of exposing curse scars to one another..."

"Are you alright?" Remus asked quietly, directing Adrian's attention away from the parental scolding Skylar was receiving, "We haven't had an incident with Skylar's scar, but it's possible it reacted to your own."

Adrian knew that wasn't the case.

"I'm fine," Adrian shrugged, curling his shoulders inwards as he locked his jaw, "I didn't like the way he looked at me."

"Unfortunately," Remus smiled dryly, the expression tugging on the disfiguration of his cheek, "People tend to stare."

Remus stood slowly, rising from his half kneeling position. He offered one hand to Adrian, weathered and calloused.

"Come along," He smiled gently, "We'll see what my kitchen has for food."

"I don't suppose you have house elves?" Adrian asked, accepting the hand and pulling himself to his feet, hunking slightly under James Potter's cautious look.

Remus chuckled lightheartedly, "None of that here. Anything we're eating we're making with our own hands- or paws." He winked playfully.

"Remus," James spoke cautiously, giving a pointed look at Adrian, "Is that really the best..."

"He knows, James." Remus sternly stated, "He's a rather intelligent boy, he figured it out on his own. A genius with magic creatures, it baffles me how he apparently performed so poorly when you taught."

"I didn't," Adrian interjected monotonously, "He just never liked me."

James flushed and had the decency to look embarrassed.

"It's true though!" Skylar defended, "Hermione says he's a textbook! And that came from *Hermione!"*

James Potter crossed his arms and shifted his weight, "Well, in that case, I owe you an apology, Mr. Selwyn."

Adrian tilted his chin slightly in a polite nod.

"Well then," Remus cleared the air, "Perhaps sandwiches for lunch?"

Remus was a decent cook, although there wasn't that much involved with creating simple sandwiches. Nonetheless, Skylar and his father gorged themselves on sliced meat and cheese layered between rye bread. Adrian's father hated rye.

He did notice large amounts of meat in Remus' food keeper, which amused him a great deal.

"Where's your snake?" Skylar blurted, holding the uneaten crusts in his hand, "The uh, the big one."

Adrian tensed and gently set his sandwich down on his plate. "I only have one snake, Potter."

"Hey, play nice." James frowned, pointing between the two, "He was just curious. I didn't know

you had a pet."

"Oh..." Remus breathed softly, clinking his elbow on the table as he rubbed his eyes and forehead with his hand, "Oh, I am so sorry, Adrian."

Adrian looked at his fingers and tore the bread apart.

"What?" James paused, "What is it Moony?"

"Adrian is a rather gifted child in that he has a familiar," Remus' voice was strained.

Skylar jolted in surprise, "Isn't that rare? Isn't that like, *impossible,* dad?"

James blinked in alarm, and looked at Remus sternly, "Unless he's been tested..."

"*James,"* Remus sounded tired.

Adrian didn't look up as the torn bits of bread were clumped into a ball and rendered inedible.

"Moony-" James struggled before he lowered his voice to a rushed hiss, "If he isn't *tested* then it can't be a confirmed familiar! They only occur after the age of..."

"Look at the exceptions!" Moony growled back, his voice deep and uncharacteristically fierce, "Look at all notable cases in which prepubescent familiar's have been recorded-"

"You can't assume that is applicable in this situation! Just because he was abused doesn't mean-"

"Abused?" A small confused voice asked, causing the table to become awfully quiet.

The unsettling wad of rye bread was now being molded into a flattened rock.

"That's not true, right dad?" Skylar asked in horror, turning and looking at James with some sort of longing, "Right dad? That's not true? *Right?"*

His voice broke, crackling awkwardly in sure sign of distress and teenage adolescence.

"Sky," James Potter sunk, realizing his guilt now at having said such a private thing in front of his son, "Sometimes bad things happen to good people-"

Adrian snorted, loudly. He stood forcefully, seething with an ugly scowl pulling the edges of his scars.

"Are you serious?" He growled slowly, hands curling into fists as something desperately raw tore inside him, "Are you *bloody serious?"*

"Adrian-" Remus started, sliding his chair back and standing slowly to not set the younger boy off.

"Oh Skylar, I am *so* sorry for the *terrible* burden you have as the Chosen One." Adrian's voice shook, "It must be simply *horrid* to have so many dark witches and wizards constantly almost *killing you.* And all that wretched fame and glory, it must be simply *too much."*

"Adrian," Remus tried again, trying to stop the tide of words.

Adrian didn't stop.

"Do you cry when *Witch Weekly* catches a photo of you with your shirt untucked? Do you have to

sign autographs every time you wander freely in Diagon?"

Skylar was paling, his complexion turning nearly sickly and his eyes glassy. Adrian's throat burned and his breaths weren't satisfying his need for air.

"What a terrible weight you have to carry alone, you wouldn't wish something as awful as *your* life on *anyone."*

Adrian was spun by a warm hand between his shoulder blades. He didn't think, he reacted and ducked his face into the soft brown robes with a fraying edge and missing button.

He couldn't hear, he only gasped for breaths as his breathing hitched and his throat created the most unbecoming sounds.

"You should go," Remus spoke softly, his words vibrating through his chest and against Adrian's shaking form.

Adrian didn't look to see if they left, he only clung on and shook with the rising panic and anxiety of the situation.

What was *happening?* Generally Lutain was near or he would circle around with cold scales and reassure-

He struggled to find his occlumency barriers and drag them upwards, dispelling the dangerous riptide of his loathing into temperamental mist.

He was sitting on a couch, tucked under the thick warmth and weight of a woolen blanket, hand knit and beginning to unravel on certain stitches.

Remus appeared, balancing a vial of something soft blue and two steaming mugs of likely tea. Adrian didn't drink tea.

"Here..." Remus shuffled, placing one mug on a nearby table and balancing the other as he fished for the vial, "I have access to a supply of calming draughts- yours I mean. I have to regulate them since you're under aged and St. Mungo's is very strict with those rules."

"Right," Adrian blinked, dazed at how he had suddenly appeared on a couch of all places, "Calming draught." His stomach was still churning and threatening a reappearance of the sandwiches.

"I brought along tea as well," Remus offered, "And warmed cider, I wasn't sure which you would prefer."

Adrian fumbled with the stopper for the calming draught, picking at the seal with broken fingernails.

"Why?" He asked quietly, voice hoarse and rough, "Why are you being nice?"

"Why wouldn't I be?" Remus countered, stifling a sigh as he settled into a deep chair across the room, nursing his cup of tea with both hands.

"Why me? Why are you being nice to me of all people?"

"Well," Remus started calmly, "I see no difference between you, or your classmates, or even a stranger."

"I was raised by *Bellatrix,"* Adrian stressed, the name sounded hollow. His hands trembled and he inhaled wetly, "I could have been raised to *kill* you."

Remus took a sip of his tea and nodded.

"I could have been raised to kill *Potter."* Adrian tried again, desperate in his attempt to scare the man.

"You could have been," Remus agreed, with the faintest glimmer of sympathy, "And if you were, I would give you freedom to live away from expectations or requirements. I would give you an opportunity to follow what *you* want to do, and not what you were raised to do."

"*No,"* Adrian argued, his voice cracked entirely as the beginning gathering of tears formed, "You shouldn't- you shouldn't be *nice* to me then-"

"Adrian," Remus started, placing his mug aside so he could lean forward with his elbows on his knees, "You told me you were adopted, by Bellatrix."

He was, he had told him that. It was true...

"It wasn't your fault." He spoke softly, "That you were left there. That you were abandoned by your birth parents- it wasn't your fault."

Adrian's heart stopped.

"I don't know anything about them, and I don't want to even think about the unspeakable mistake they made," Remus continued, voice firm and somehow, his words shone like a lighthouse in the middle of a raging storm, "but Adrian, know that it wasn't your fault. There isn't anything wrong with you, it wasn't your fault."

"No." Adrian shook his head, why couldn't Remus *see?* He should- Adrian was dangerous, he shouldn't be- "No, no...*no*..."

"It wasn't your fault Adrian," He repeated carefully, "and I'll tell you that every day for however long it takes for you to realize that. You weren't abandoned because of who you are. It wasn't your fault."

Adrian shattered.

Starve

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian is irritated, angry, and then wracked with guilt.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to all of my Beta's for the help!
This chapter hopefully will pull on your heartstrings.
Enjoy!

The most excruciating problem with residing inside Lupin's small home, was the maddening prickling under his skin.

He itched and ached for his other wand, the phoenix feather and holly wand he had removed the ministry trace from *years* back; the wand he used to practice magic. He could almost see it, held carefully in a box hidden in his father's estate.

Instead he used his spare, the second wand he always took with him to Hogwarts and into public. It fit adequately, but tingled sourly in a way which only made his magic hurt so much worse.

How he *burned* to release and send curse after curse at the wall, to slash deep grooves and burns across the wooden boards until the entire house shook from his fury.

He wanted to do so *so badly,* it made him sick to his stomach and muscles clench against the burn of staying still.

Remus had panicked at the first instance where Adrian's temper had flared and soured the air so poignantly. He thrashed and screamed, clawing at his own arms to let the *burning out.*

The mediwizards assured the werewolf in soothing tones, that it was simply an aftereffect of the curse scar. Adrian wasn't as convinced, something about it drew on his weakness and urged him to burn the entire house down with fire. A curse scar wouldn't construct such desirable thoughts.

The worst part out of the situation, was that Remus wasn't leaving him alone like he had first assumed he would. The man would check in on Adrian constantly throughout the day, making sure that he took his potions or didn't skip a meal. It was treated and monitored in such a way Adrian prickled at the loss of his independence, Bellatrix or his father had never tread so carefully over him.

("Adrian, stop scratching."

"I'm not scratching."

"I can still *see you*-…")

He supposed it was until he relaxed and cooled down from whatever ailment made his body spasm and his magic twitch. It already was fading, the fits taking less time and singing more mutedly in his blood. Remus seemed to notice as well, his relief was very obvious.

The Potters and Sirius Black visited often.

Adrian prefered the heir to the Black fortune and riches, he was bold and annoyingly blunt but also seemed to understand Adrian's habits and personality better than Remus could. He cooled down the werewolf, explaining in simple terms his need to be alone.

Remus had explained in stressed and worried tones, his concern over Adrian's occasional fits. Sirius Black was on edge with the explanations, he never quite relaxed with Adrian after such admissions.

Black's terse and tense visits were much more preferable to the Potter's, who often brought along not *only* Skylar, but a troupe of Weasley's in an attempt to 'give the Selwyn bloke some decent friends for once.'

Somewhere across magical Britain, Draco was laughing himself to tears.

Adrian was invited to Skylar Potter's birthday party, yet given the more paranoid state the Potter's were now living in, it wasn't a very public event.

Adrian vehemently expressed how he would *hate* to intrude on such a welcome occasion, which naturally caused the embodiments of fate to laugh.

Potter's simply arranged for the party to take place at *Remus' house.*

Adrian wanted to clobber one of them.

Between the loud shrieks of Ronald Weasley, and the chaotic laughter of the two elder twins (Adrian could tolerate those two, they had made several investments in his services to obtain illegal potion ingredients), it was beginning to add to the headache pounding in his skull.

Skylar seemed bemused by the situation, offering without a thought to help Ronald remove the thick purplish goo from where it coated the back of his neck.

"It's nice to see them relaxing," Lily chimed contently to Mrs. Weasley. The elder woman nodded her head vigorously, "Oh yes! Simply wonderful, I do hope that Skylar dear enjoys himself."

James laughed heartily as the twins managed to land a temporary dung bomb on their new target, the elder brother Charlie who flailed backwards at the smell.

"Don't you want to play?" Remus asked curiously, peering at the small collection of gingers and Skylar, "I hear that they're going to be heading outside to fly for a bit."

Adrian scowled as he forcefully peered out of the nearest window to observe the sunny outdoors, "I don't like quidditch."

"What?" James gasped as if struck, "but... I had heard that you were good at flying…"

"Who in Merlin's name told you *that* rubbish?" Adrian snarled out, his neck prickling uncomfortably, "I don't like flying, I don't like quidditch, and I don't like *you."*

"Adrian dear," Mrs. Weasley floundered, gobsmacked by the aggressive display, "Certainly you

don't mean that. I'm sure Ronald would love to show you how to fly…"

Adrian glared at her coldly, his lip curling in a way he knew made his face appear even more grotesque.

"Adrian." Remus barked, his voice stern and layered with something dissapointed, "That is no way to speak to elders or to behave,"

"Oh *sorry,* I haven't had manners ingrained into me," Adrian snappishly retorted, "I was busy learning other lessons of fine etiquette instead of how to talk to *blood traitors."*

He felt a surge of satisfaction, a sadistic sense of glee at his scathing remark. Lily flinched boldly, while Mrs. Weasley gasped obscurely.

"That's it," James' face darkened and his voice was clipped. He stood up imposingly, which would have had more effect if Adrian wasn't nearly his own height, "That is no way to talk to us."

Remus stood as well, at this point the small group of children had stopped laughing and were now watching fascinated.

"James…" Remus trailed off with a sigh, "You're being too harsh-"

"*Harsh?"* James echoed in disbelief, "Moony, you have no idea how to raise a child-"

"I'm not being *raised,* by anyone." Adrian hissed back sourly, "I don't need raising!"

"Then stop being an idiotic kid and smarten up!" James shouted back, face flushing angrily, "or Merlin forbid, I'll convince Moony to drop you right off at St. Mungo's for the rest of the holidays."

Adrian tensed and leant forward slightly, hunkering instantly to accommodate the phantom scales that should have risen to coil around his shoulders. He felt nothing, and with a flash of sorrow he flinched noticeably.

"Dad," Skylar complained boldly, crossing his arms with a frown, "He didn't mean it, he's been around Malfoy too much and he just slipped."

"Yeah-" The two twins chorused, "Everyone knows how that slimy ferret-"

"Is *such* a fan of us-"

"Why Gred, I do believe that he says the most beautiful names-"

"Oh Forge, I *know,* It's a marvel our little scaled friend-"

"Nothing mean by that, you're our favourite little slimy snake-"

"We say it in the nicest way-"

Adrian rubbed his eyes sharply and resisted the urge to draw his wand and start throwing curses.

Considering how often he talked and arranged deals with people, he truly didn't know how to socialize with people.

"We'll take him off your hands-" The twins started, one of them lazily throwing an arm around his shoulders.

Adrian opened his mouth to argue, but the Twins' involvement had apparently soothed James enough that the topic was dropped. The twins were a soft spot in the hearts of the pranksters.

"You do that," James nodded and paused consideringly, "Maybe talk to him about those seats."

'Seats?' Adrian wondered instantly, yet whatever it was, he had a bad feeling about it.

He was right. He didn't like the seats to the Quidditch World Cup at all.

Fred and George were the only tolerable ones in the entire house.

More often than not, Adrian woke up to the muffled noises of visitors in the home. Remus, having never been exposed to or used to children, was struggling in his attempts to 'raise Adrian'. He had overheard Sirius muttering about how Remus certainly picked a challenge for his first try.

Adrian tried not to feel smug about that.

He was labeled as the brooding type, which was fine as everyone seemed to give him distance. Well, as much distance as possible in the small home Remus could afford with his Hogwarts staff wages and other unknown income sources. In another life, Adrian may have offered to periodically cut Remus' hair and sell it to Knockturn Alley potion suppliers. Werewolf hair was never ever easy to come by.

Up close, Adrian was able to see another side to Skylar and the others, which contrasted and simultaneously fueled his assumptions in one go. Skylar wasn't a brat; he knew the brattish type after one glance at Draco. Skylar was overwhelmingly *good,* his morals and compassion so strong it struck Adrian like a physical blow.

He could throw boiling water at the boy, clobber him or spit threats for days on end. Somehow, the golden hero would smile and accept it and apologize because somehow *he* had upset Adrian, and that was certainly not polite of him.

It was infuriating and suffocating. Adrian wanted to fight a brat, he wanted to fight a selfish naive *jerk,* who would siffle and mewl under his curses.

Adrian knew that instead of that, Skylar would simply smile sadly and accept anything and everything he cast at him.

It was unfair. He wanted a challenge, he wanted a target that with one glance he *knew* that he was justified.

Adrian was *vindictive,* and Potter was so masochistically subdued it ruined all of his assurance.

Not only that, the other boy seemed to take in the burdens of everyone else without buckling under the strain. He offered the Weasley's a shoulder to cry on, he offered his best friend, Ron, someone to confide in.

Adrian had wandered through the rooms one night, a few days before they were to leave for the Quidditch World Cup. The adults were in the kitchen, discussing plans under silencing charms and steaming mugs of tea.

The twins had left with their older brothers (Adrian had formed a sort of peculiar bond with the one boy, Charlie. A mutual friendship over snarky puns involving Wyverns and Hungarian Horntails),

leaving the house unsettlingly quiet.

The lack of Lutain's snark and softly scraping scales made everything seem that much lonelier.

Adrian *knew* that the Potters wouldn't abandon Skylar here all alone, no matter how important their discussion was. Which led to the unfortunate scene Adrian stumbled into.

Ronald Weasley, normally brash and hard headed, mewling and sobbing disgusting sounds onto the shoulder of Skylar. The latter of course had a sort of unwavering sympathy, patting the other boy's shoulder firmly yet somehow gentle.

"I can't..." Ron sobbed, entire body shaking as he trembled harder, "...Ginny."

Oh, right.

Ginny Weasley.

'Leave her in the Chamber' The words flashed through his mind with chilling coldness. His own tone so blank, it was unrecognizable.

'Let her starve to death.'

Adrian flinched so violently, his shoulder clipped the doorframe with a emphasized bang. The noise startled the two, alerting them of his presence.

"You!" Ron shouted, sniffling against the viscous snot in his nose, "You...you… you *slimy git!"*

"Ron," Skylar started, his voice sharp yet somehow understanding, "Ron leave it, he wasn't-"

"No!" Ron shouted, ignoring how the sound would likely carry into the kitchen, "He...He's a *Slytherin,* he was *in* on it, mate!"

Skylar looked torn, his brown eyes widening as he looked at Adrian in a silent plea.

"What happened to her?" Ron sobbed, on the verge of screaming in his grief, "What did you *do* to *her?"*

"I-" Adrian stumbled to make a noise, overwhelmed and in shock at the focused conviction. It was impossible the boy knew, he *couldn't* know.

"Ron!" Skylar shouted, one hand clapping the redhead's shoulder firmly, "Ron, mate, let him go. He wasn't part of it, mate. He's Mione's friend."

"Some friend!" Ron shrieked angrily, his face flushing horrendously, "Goes around making *bloody bets,* crawling to Malfoy and those other gits…"

"I make *deals,"* Adrian countered sourly, sneering sharply in return, "A few that *you've* used if I remember right."

"No," Ron laughed ugly, "You just crawl from one bloke to the next, hoping you get a scrap from anyone."

Adrian recoiled in surprise, before it swiftly shifted to aggression.

"*Excuse me?"* Adrian hissed, almost shifting to parseltongue. Ron jutted his chin out, hands curling into fists.

"You heard me!" He barked harshly, "You're just a dog, crawling on your belly for everyone so you don't get blamed, you *spineless coward…"*

"Ron!" Skylar started, shoving the boy backwards and physically out of his accusatory trance, "Ron, mate, no. You don't know his life, it's different for him…"

"I do what I have to do to survive!" Adrian growled back, eyes glittering dangerously as his blood tingled for his other wand, to point and silence that mongrel, "You three have me to thank for *everything."*

"Right!" Ron laughed, trying to sound patronizing, "like Mione couldn't do any of that without you!"

Adrian opened his mouth to retort, he never had the opportunity to respond before the Weasley continued with his tirade.

"Hermione is smarter than you any day!" He continued, "So what if you got us potion ingredients? Mione would have found them herself! So what you found out that Chamber stuff, she would have found it anyways. You aren't important to us, you aren't needed, and you *aren't* our friend!"

"Alright that's it!" Skylar shouted, pushing Ron away so he was now across the room. Skylar outstretched his arms, holding them palm spread to form an imaginary barrier between the two boys, "Ron, Adrian's helped us out more than Mione could. Yes she's smart, but it would take her time to find that stuff, it *helps* to have another person looking!"

Skylar's voice was sharp, his face in a pointed expression yet somehow he still retained the gentle lilt to his tone. Ron opened his mouth to argue, and Skylar sighed, "C'mon mate, just because Slytherin wrecked your family doesn't mean the same didn't happen to him."

That jarred Adrian. Deeply.

"And you," Skylar turned, nodding to Adrian who still stood tense in the doorway, "I know we've gotten off on the wrong foot, but some of that's your fault too."

Adrian blinked, "Wha- *my* fault…"

"You haven't exactly made it easy," Skylar admitted, "although Hermione really is fond of you. You have moment's too, where you're a prat-"

Adrian flushed angrily and opened his mouth to argue.

"*But,"* Skylar hurriedly added, "you're really not bad. Bloody good dueler and wicked at Care."

'What,' Adrian blinked, trying to think.

All semblances or traces of thought refused to form, dancing out of his grip like his occlumency barrier turned against him. He floundered, looking as shocked as Weasley.

"I think," Skylar started, his voice much more soft and gentle than he had used with either of them, "that Ginny would really have liked you."

'Leave her in the chamber.'

He flinched, viciously and in such a way his chest physically ached.

He missed Lutain so dearly.

Ron looked scrutinizing, his face pinching tightly, "Fred and George say you're not bad," Ron admitted sourly, "and she was closest with them."

'In the chamber?'

"Right," Skylar started brightly, "she loves..." Skylar faltered slightly as he corrected himself, "*Loved,* flying horses, the winged ones ya know? What were they, uh…"

Skylar trailed off awkwardly, glancing at Ron who looked as if he was somewhere caught between brooding and mourning, "Granian," He quietly confirmed, "drove Mum up the wall with how she wanted one out back."

Adrian stared, yet behind his open eyes he saw the excited expression of his father tugging and pulling him further down.

'In the chamber? All alone?'

"No," Adrian cleared his throat, from where it felt like it was closing on him, "Aethenon are the only species registered in Britain."

Ron seemed baffled, and in a few seconds his expression shifted through a scale of different emotions. Anger, sadness, satisfaction, curiosity, and caution. It settled on something neutral, bland yet with the smallest touches of acceptance, "Yeah, that one. Got Charlie to try and make a stable out back."

The idea that housing an Aethenon at the Weasley estate was even possible, was laughable. The creatures were huge, and required enormous amounts of fodder and grain just for daily life, not counting the exercise and expensive riding gear.

Somehow, the mental image of a little girl trying to persuade loving parents that they *needed* one was charming. Bittersweet in a hollow aching way.

Adrian had taken that, had taken her away from them.

'Leave her in the chamber to starve.'

Adrian had killed Ginny. He hadn't ever thought of it like that, so bluntly stated in his head. He *knew* that he had killed her, he left her to her demise.

The ramifications of his actions hadn't ever set in, they hadn't ever occurred to him. She had just been a first year, in the wrong place at the wrong time. She was a casualty in war; she held no more significance than a shirt Bellatrix had ruined during training. She had *died,* but it felt more to him that she had...expired; her use and her ability had ended, she was the shed Lutain left behind as he continued to grow.

He had never thought of her as someone with individual dreams and desires, an individual life that everyone would mourn and miss and remember.

She hadn't...she hadn't (or had she always been?) a *person,* in his eye. She was just an object, a possession of the wrong side…

He had left her behind, left her lying in a pool of water too weak to stand or speak.

He had turned his back on her and left her on the floor.

"I mean he didn't," Ron added on, now deep in the throes of nostalgia, "well, he *did,* but it was more of a shack. The Gnomes got in after a week, we used it as a quaffle post, see how far we could chuck gnomes in it."

Her hair had spread around her fallen form, outstretched like stringy wet rays of sunshine. Her complexion was far too pale, like spoiled milk.

"That's what that shed is?" Skylar asked intrigued, "I always thought it was for gardening,"

"Merlin no," Ron almost smiled, "Charlie was proving to mum he and Gin' could have a pet, although Charlie wanted a dragon…"

His father had been so happy, his expression thrilled and so lifelike Adrian could have felt cooled skin.

Adrian didn't even curse her, he left her to perish like a *muggle.*

"You okay there, mate?" Skylar asked, his smile faltering as he caught sight of Adrian's rapidly paling complexion, "You looking a bit peachy there…"

His father had laughed, he had smiled and crooned sweet words of praise and pride as he turned and walked over wet stone.

"Ron, go get-" Skylar started, his voice sounding muffled.

Adrian didn't notice.

Somewhere over the sounds of Tom Riddle laughing in his head, he had heard the desperate breathy sounds of Ginny sobbing.

He had walked away and left Ginny Weasley crying alone in the chamber, he had *walked away.*

Hadrianus Selwyn killed Ginny Weasley.

It suddenly didn't sound as alluring as it once had.

He teetered, and heard Skylar give a cry of alarm.

'Leave her in the Chamber.'

'All alone? In the Chamber?'

'Let her starve to death.'

If you would like to participate in a Poll I have running on Fanfiction.net, please click:

Here

This poll addresses which 'side' you're on, as well as romantic pairing. This poll will only affect the ending of the story, but is still important. Please note, that the poll will be only open for a window of time.

Bloodbath

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian finds his friend, attacks an auror, and only regrets his actions slightly

Chapter Notes

Thanks to all of you who messaged me on Tumblr and prompted me to post this chapter tonight!

What horrified Adrian more in the last couple days wasn't how he fainted under the pretense of his 'Curse scar', or the fact that he had to share a tent with Twins, or even the fact that he was being dragged *with the Potters* to a Quidditch match.

It was that the box they were seated in, was *also* occupied by the Malfoy Family.

The entire Malfoy Family.

Under different circumstances, Adrian may have enjoyed how Draco's expression went through an alarming array of emotions in such a short time. It ended on gobsmacked confusion, alternating between cruel sneers directed at Adrian's company.

Remus was unsettled by the display, although he never steered Adrian away which would have only further escalated it.

"Potters," Draco's father spoke smoothly, eyes sharp as he observed the entire group, only pausing for a short while on Adrian, "How charitable to grant the Weasley's a place in such lavish decorum."

The Weasley's in question flushed, although civilly returned the jab with another clipped remark. Adrian didn't overly care to listen, nor was he interested in Draco's attempts to gain his attention. He stared blankly out of the enchanted glass.

He didn't like quidditch. He didn't like being there.

Adrian wanted to go *home,* he missed Lutain. He missed the strange system he had with his father...

He missed the unspoken environment that screamed mutual respect- he missed the independence and the freedom to cast spells or curses whenever he pleased. He missed knowing that any questions he had could be answered immediately, even the simplest inquiries answered with an exasperated sigh but a well instructed answer.

He missed all of it, he missed his *father.*

Adrian should be excited with the inevitable fruition of the plans, slowly growing closer and closer with every quidditch point scored.

His nerves twitched and sparked unsettlingly, twisting his stomach until he felt queasy. He knew what was going to happen, he *knew* and nobody else did.

But he missed Lutain, he missed Nagini. It was depressing to try and communicate with the mentally handicapped tattoo that only held the faintest impression of the giant snake.

As teams competed and the hours ticked on and on, he found himself contradicting his desires.

Adrian was anxious. As much as he missed his family and as dearly he wanted his companion once again, he was dearly dreading when the attack was to actually happen.

There was something comforting, about the role he had found for himself in the presence of the Werewolf. Something gentle and homely in a way nothing else was.

The sun descended, throwing long shadows on the ground. The sun glittered orange and illuminated torches as if they caged phoenixes. The stadium began to empty. The stands were a disorienting swirl of colour as hundreds of people began to leave for the Floo or Portkey stations. Others traveled still, moving to prepaid campsites where they would stay for the festivities.

The box Adrian was in rose, stretching cramped muscles and chatting excitedly about the stunts and skills they had just seen. The quidditch players had barely registered to Adrian, they were only points which marked the passage of time.

The sun had descended below the horizon, tainting the air with the fading glow of twilight.

"Adrian?" Remus asked gently, not prodding the younger boy, "We're leaving."

Adrian didn't want to get up and leave his chair. It meant that it was going to happen, it meant that it was really going to happen.

He distantly noticed that the Malfoy's had vanished from sight, was Draco's father already preparing for the raid?

How would he find Bellatrix, how would he *not* be targeted…

He flinched largely as something stretched and silently tore near the flesh of his left hip. It snaked upwards, chillingly cold as it caressed his bones and wormed its way to his throat.

"Are you okay?" Remus frowned, resting one large hand between Adrian's shoulder blades.

Adrian nodded, pulling his cloak closer to his body and under his chin.

They were all so *oblivious…*

"I'm fine," Adrian spoke, giving a small cough to try and disguise his shivering, "Just cold."

Remus smiled reassuringly, "It gets colder at night, I always underestimate it as well. Did you pack a warmer cloak?"

Small talk, they were making *small talk.*

"I did," Adrian smiled weakly, thankful that the sudden darkness disguised how shaky he felt, "It's in the tent."

They were making small talk.

(And they were all going to die.)

Adrian felt sick.

Remus opened his mouth to respond before his head jerked upwards peering in one direction frozen.

"Moony?" Sirius barked teasingly, his smile faltering when he noticed how intent Remus' expression was.

"What is it?" James asked, removing one arm from around his wife, "Moony, what-"

From the night rose a chaotic medley of screams. Beautiful in its synchronous movements, it spread outwards in a half circle around the perimeter of the campgrounds.

From the ground burst dragonfire, spreading molten wings and roaring soundlessly into the night sky.

"Fiendfyre!" James shouted, barely audible over the dark magic, "Run!"

Adrian's skin tingled as Nagini's phantom tongue lovingly flickered against the hollow of his throat, *"Find us."*

"Go!" Remus shouted, drawing his wand and ushering Adrian with the younger children towards the emergency Portkey stations.

"Stay with Lily!" He shouted, pointing with his wand directly at Adrian. Remus' eyes flickered golden, reflecting fire roaring in the sky.

Adrian nodded without seeing, sprinting after the crowd on autopilot.

He heard the screams and cries of people; women and men alike. Tents were on fire, spells of purple and yellow flung around the clearing, fending off the acrid green.

Adrian'd father always said his eyes looked so similar.

Another group of panicking family melded with Adrian's group. In the chaos of screaming and pushing bodies, Adrian ducked behind a tree. The bark pressed sharply through his thin cloak, leaving temporary indents against his skin.

Nagini twisted disgustingly on his chest, tugging against his body unnaturally. Lovingly she danced, grotesquely pulling and persuading nausea to rise.

Adrian pulled out his wand, thankful he had it on him at all times. He held it flat in his palm, staring at the wood blankly before he focused enough to think.

"Point me…" He trailed off uncertain. Would Lutain be possible to cast? He wasn't sure if the spell could find a snake.

He would find the next best thing.

"Point me Bellatrix Lestrange," He mumbled under his breath, half expecting the spell to not work.

It did, and pointed him towards the chaos.

He should have known.

Adrian hadn't ever seen a battlefield.

He had dueled with Bellatrix, he had fought off various malicious curses and spells. If he was ever struck, she would speak the counterspell or heal it afterwards.

He had never ever considered that those targeted wouldn't be as fortunate.

It was a childish thought in hindsight, a innocent mindset that crashed to the ground the moment he saw the first body.

It was slashed open, hip to hip, and from the gash silvery purple organs spilled out like a ruptured pastry.

Adrian had never seen organs before. He had never *ever* thought about what they would look like even as he himself learned the same spell.

They were darker than he expected, slimy like an eel yet shimmery like Nagini in the dark.

They stank something warm and putrid, foul enough for Adrian's stomach to clench.

The man's eyes were glassy and clouded, but not to the obscure degree he had always imagined.

He stepped over the body, not even feeling the bloodied grass as it caressed his ankles and left red trails in wake. He kept walking, past smoldering tents and remnants of a tree.

Something far off in the distance exploded with a spectacular bang.

He could see them swarming, the Death Eaters. They moved as a unified front, black cloaks melding with the night while bone white masks stared hauntingly into the dark. They were experienced duelers, moving and casting, soundless except incantations. Some moved so fast, Adrian didn't even see the movement.

He was closer, and that's where he drew to a stop. They moved past him silently, not seeing his body shrouded by the trees.

He did not see Bellatrix, instead his weakness was not of human eyes. He was found by the heat scenting eyes of a mighty snake many times his size.

"Cerestes?" Nagini crooned, slithering across the battle torn grass faster than he had expected she could, *"Little one!"*

"Nagini?" Adrian asked back, feeling foolish at once. Who else would be of her size and actively seeking him out?

"Yes!" She hissed happily, reaching his hiding place and coiling around his lower legs in an embrace, *"I have wand for you."*

"What?' Adrian blurted, feeling far too slow for the rapidity of the situation, *"How could you have my wand…"*

And Nagini spasmed, jerking and wheezing sickly to vomit a brown bag roughly the size of a rabbit. It was covered in bile and other bodily fluids, slick and flattened by her muscles.

"Wand," Nagini agreed pleasantly, *"And human scales! Come! Lutain awaits!"*

"Lutain?" Adrian echoed numbly, unfastening the slimy bag to reach into its expanded depth. He felt his wand, holly and phoenix feather. The one void of the Ministry Trace. Although it mattered not, not with all of the magic in the air.

"Yes!" Nagini excitedly informed him, *"Over with the mad lady. Across the fire, hurry! He misses you so, hurry Cerestes!"*

Adrian almost argued that he wasn't Cerestes.

His hands felt the chilling material, sewn to the lower hem of his cloak. He pulled it out carefully, trailing fingers over its clasp and silken lining. It felt very heavy in his hands.

He pulled it on, tugging it over his head.

'What am I doing?' he thought hazily to himself, lethargically pushing his brain to think.

Nagini turned, slumping to the ground in preparation to move.

"Nagini?" Adrian spoke mutedly, his head buzzing loudly as he traced the wood of his wand.

She turned her head and glanced at him questioningly.

"I missed you," Adrian confessed, feeling very much like a child.

"I missed you too," She crooned back, her voice lilting and alluring as her scales reflected firelight, *"Come, Cerestes."*

Adrian did, he walked out with her mighty girth near his shin. Her presence both soothed him and warped his perception. There was dangerous magic in the air, tingling and pressing on his skin lovingly.

"Master missed you too." Nagini mentioned casually, *"He hunted prey alone and did not look happy."*

"He missed me?" The idea tasted like honey, saccharine and sick. *"Father missed me?"*

"He did," Nagini confirmed, her body climbing over the fallen corpse of something Adrian couldn't remember, *"He misses you.'*

That sounded wonderful, it sounded *perfect.*

There was a voice to Adrian's left, something ugly and sharp which shattered the tranquility Adrian had surrounded himself in.

A flash of red shot over the ground, directly at Adrian's chest.

"Protego," Adrian cast, jerking the movements and blurting the incantation out of reflex. Nonetheless, he waved his arm just as how his Father had taught him. The spell held, deflecting the stunner without danger.

"Prey!" Nagini spat, sounding offended and infuriated at the same time.

Adrian shifted into his dueling stance, Nagini tensed at his heels.

The chaos Bellatrix had created and the smell of fire brought sudden clarity in a way nothing else had before.

The man fired another spell, not a stunner but something Adrian recognized as a body bind. He sidestepped, swinging his arm with the momentum to send his curse back.

It left his wand a violent lavender, cast perfectly without a hitch despite how long it had been.

The moment the spell was cast, [1] it did *something.* Adrian groaned, his legs collapsing as he crumpled onto the waiting form of Nagini.

"Little One," Nagini prompted patiently, *"Rise,"*

His entire body spasmed, breathing felt electrifying. His nerves and muscles tensed in preparation and in *need.*

'More more more'

"Abrumpo!" He hissed, nearly switching to his other tongue. The dark cutting curse sped into the dark, removing a portion of the man's cloak. The spell sent euphoria down his arm, pulsating as adrenaline pumped and made everything so much *sharper.* It was good he already was shaking on the ground- his legs would have collapsed from under him.

He sent it again, rising unsteadily to continue his dance. Nagini's tail twisted excitedly, watching with rapt attention.

"Abrumpo!" He sent again, slashing over and over through the night and darkness as his body hummed. His magic sang happily, pulsing in beat to his heart as it danced through the air.

Was this why Bellatrix laughed when dueling?

He would laugh as well.

The man tripped over something, collapsing on the ground as his eyes bugged out. He mouthed something, the words unheard behind the rushing of blood in Adrian's ears.

Adrian didn't think, he slashed his wand through the air once again. The word tumbled from his lips, foreign but *oh so practiced.*

It hit its mark.

Something warm splashed over Adrian's face, deflected by the spell on his hood yet soaking the fabric around his throat. Wet and hot, it spread downwards slowly in intrusive rivulets.

Adrian could hear again, he could see again.

The man was gurgling feebly, one hand clutching his chest where he…

"Why did you stop?" Nagini complained, slithering over curiously towards the man. He screamed, either in horror or pain. Maybe the man was screaming because of Nagini, or perhaps it was-

"I-" Adrian choked off, body shaking either from such a glorious bliss leaving him so soon, or due to the blood staining his clothing. "I didn't-"

The man's eyes were bulging, his hands were gasping against his torn and butchered chest.

"He is prey," Nagini simplified, *"Prey are eaten."*

The man gasped something wetly, it sounded faintly like a plea.

What had he done.

What had he *done?*

"You!" Someone shouted, racing over the battlefield in the distinct cloak and armor of the Ministry Aurors.

Adrian stumbled upwards, jerking a step backwards. Nagini hissed displeased at the interruption, flexing her muscles.

"He cannot stay," Nagini surmised, thinking clearly for Adrian since he struggled to remember how to speak.

Adrian stomach lurched, *"Nagini don't-"*

The giant snake lunged forward, fangs sinking into muscle and jugular with a sound of wet parchment tearing.

Adrian flinched. The man on the ground didn't plea anymore.

"No!" The auror shouted, flinging a stunner across the distance in anger, "Leave him alone!"

Adrian raised a shield on automatic, protecting Nagini. Her maw was coated in gore.

The auror threw another spell, Adrian blocked and sent a blindness curse in return. It sang and tingled in his blood, threatening to overwhelm him as his spells before. It tempted him to begin another frenzy of dark magic.

He restrained himself, turning to run only when he saw the auror scream and clutch his eyes in pain.

"Nagini!" Adrian hissed, prompting for the serpent to lead the way back to where Bellatrix had been.

He didn't dare look back, he couldn't afford to look back.

If he dared to, he couldn't pretend that he hadn't-

Adrian kept running.

"Master!" Lutain shouted, flinging himself off of Bellatrix's neck like a leaping dog.

The large snake made the distance, wrapping heavily around Adrian's forearm albeit clumsily.

"Master!" Lutain repeated with the same intensity, despite the reduced distance, *"You're here!"*

"Lutain!" Adrian responded with equal enthusiasm. He couldn't help the smile that spread across his face, leaving him breathless and thrilled, *"I have so much to tell you!"*

"I have much to tell you!" Lutain countered smugly, *"Many sheds! One shed entire strip!"*

"Well that's impressive," Adrian admitted in good humor, smiling shakily.

Lutain stared, cocking his head in interest, *"You look sick."*

"I'm not," Adrian assured, swallowing the lump down his throat, *"You remember Remus? Well,*

he's pretty much promised us into the Order."

Lutain cocked his head the other way, interested, *"Of the birds?"*

"Phoenix," Adrian corrected, helping the long serpent coil around his throat and neck like an elaborate necktie, *"and yes. Lutain, it worked. Everything worked, oh I've missed you so much."*

"As I you, Master." Lutain flicked his tongue against the ridge of his knuckles, *"I missed you much. Never leave again?"*

"I won't," Adrian swore, eyes prickling and throat clogging, *"Never again."*

Novice

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian comes home, Daphne gets help, and Draco is a bit upset.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to all of my beta's for the help!
Thanks to everyone who left a comment! I'll go through and answer every question I can!

"Are you alright?" Lutain inquired, flicking his tongue to scent Adrian's throat attentively for signs of sickness.

"I'm fine," Adrian responded promptly, lavishing in his ability to speak parseltongue.

Lutain seemed skeptical of his reply, although he did slither further down Adrian's chest to nestle above one hip.

His room was just how he remembered it, the strange collection of magical artifacts and creature claws and teeth. The various odds and ends barely related to one another, and made his room seem chaotic and discomforting for anyone who would visit.

Well, Bella visited and she didn't seem too bothered by it all, although that wasn't saying much.

"You don't seem fine," Lutain noted, staring at him contently from his spot on Adrian's abdomen.

Adrian smiled wistfully, and gently stroked the smooth scales of his friend.

"It's hard to explain," Adrian confessed quietly, pausing in his rhythmic strokes.

"Is it the wolf?" Lutain asked interested, tail tip twitching slightly. He scented the air twice, his long tongue nearly tickling Adrian's chin.

"It is," Adrian confessed almost embarrassed, *"It was...It was strange living with him. For a while at least."*

Lutain huffed, the movement flexing his muscles and causing him to puff up slightly, *"I should have bit before."*

"No no," Adrian smiled affectionately, trying not to laugh at his friend, *"Nothing like that. It was different, not bad. It was like how I imagine a normal family is."*

"Oh," Lutain deflated, looking guarded yet somehow very exposed, *"Nagini told me, of her hatching. It was cold and lonely, and she was separated and stored in boxes and fed sparingly."*

Adrian blinked in surprise, he hadn't expected such a revelation from his friend.

"I had hatching outside," Lutain added, his tone dismissive yet still hesitant, *"In den with eggs and rocks."*

Adrian glanced to his side, peering out of the window that showed nothing in the darkness of night. Despite that, he found comfort in knowing he would see the familiar grounds he had missed so dearly.

"Prey was hard to find," Lutain continued, knowing that Adrian would always be listening, *"Birds and always hunted by bigger threat. Then humans came, they came and they took."* Lutain's tail thrashed in his discomfort, an unsettling whistle through his nostrils.

"Is that how you ended up in that zoo?"

"Yes," Lutain scented the air, turning to look at Adrian in the eyes, *"That was before. That was life of normal."*

Adrian smiled, tracing one finger along the crease of his familiar's jawbone.

"Normal was suffering," Lutain quietly added, entire body tensing slowly throughout his speech.

"Life now is much better than normal," Lutain finished, butting his snout forwards to burrow into Adrian's shirt close to his neck, *"So happy that life now is not normal."*

Oh, and suddenly it made so much more sense.

Lutain felt heavy, an unsettling weight that compressed Adrian's chest just so.

"Yeah," Adrian spoke, almost choking on the sounds, "I wouldn't want a normal life either."

Liar.

The floorboards were dark wood, scuffed with time yet still polished and stank of vanity.

Of all the differences between the two households, Adrian didn't think that it would be the floorboards that truly let it sink in.

"Are you not hungry?" Nagini inquired, peering up lazily from where she coiled near the heated rock in the kitchen.

Adrian blinked, startled out of his thoughts.

"I wonder the same myself," languished elegant hisses, accented only slightly in such a way they sounded more regal than Nagini's own tone. Distinctly male, his father's voice.

"I just-" Adrian swallowed the lump down his throat, twisting the fork in his grip and refusing to meet his father's eyes, *"I'm still acclimating."*

Nagini made a noise of agreement, *"Never eat after new place."*

The information was so serpentine yet spoken so solemnly, Adrian couldn't help but smile.

"That is true, my dear," his father responded, the slightest lilt to his words to show that he too was amused, *"However, he is a human."*

Nagini flicked her tongue blandly, *"Would Cerestes like a rabbit?"*

Adrian smiled and shifted his fruit slice around the plate once more with his fork, *"No thank you, Nagini. I am sure you could hunt a dozen rabbits for all of us."*

She chortled happily at the praise and set her head down to rest on her coils.

"And where is your friend?" Adrian's father spoke in English.

Adrian paused and slowly looked up, briefly catching ruby eyes before he focused just beyond his father's ear.

"Lutain didn't sleep well last night," Adrian admitted calmly, "I let him rest in my room."

His father hummed wordlessly, folding his hands in front of his chest.

"That creature always prefers to spend time in your room,"

Adrian's heart fluttered at the thought of his familiar spending every night he was gone sleeping in his bed.

"I heard from Nagini that he missed me," Adrian confessed, lips twitching slightly into a small smile.

"Master did as well," Nagini grumbled from her spot on the floor, *"He will deny but it is true."*

"Hush you," Adrian's father retorted although only with affection in his hisses, *"You've been spending too much time with the brat. Developing some cheek."*

"It is nice to have you home," Nagini nearly purred, flicking her tongue towards the table.

"It is." Adrian's father confessed after a brief pause.

All doubts ebbed away, leaving a comfortable warmth that left Adrian questioning why he had ever felt so insecure about his place by his father's side.

"At the Quidditch World Cup…" Adrian started, trailing off as he wasn't truly sure what the question was that he was asking.

His father seemed to understand, and didn't mind the open ending.

"The raid was successful, not only did the Ministry suffer heavy losses, but we cemented a key position in our plans."

Adrian peered to the side and met ruby iris' questioningly, "And you, father?"

His father rolled his eyes in a surprisingly human display. His wrist twitched, flicking imaginary dust through the air and away from him.

"I did not appear, as such my return has not been announced. This was a...a*desperate plea,* as the paper's are naming it."

His father's lip curled in a disgusted grimace. Adrian gave a burst of laughter, then felt a quick wave of horror at how blatant he had been.

His father met his eyes and arched one eyebrow calmly, "You seem in brighter spirits."

Adrian quickly dropped his eyes and shifted uncomfortably, "A-as do you, father."

His father frowned slightly, the corner of his mouth tilting downwards. He folded his hands, resting his forearms on the wood of the table.

"My magic has settled," His father spoke, words smooth like honey.

"Wh-" Adrian started to blurt, before he swallowed his questions and waited.

He peered at Adrian calmly with a sense of tranquility he had never displayed before, "Among other things. In your absence, many things have...become apparent."

Adrian didn't understand what he meant, even though it seemed like some sort of great admission.

"That's good." Adrian lamely stated, unsure of how to proceed.

"I see you yourself have as well," his father's eyes glittered with something Adrian was hesitant to call amusement.

What did he mean by his magic settling-

Adrian inhaled as the previous magical sensations he had been experiencing suddenly made much more sense.

"You wanted me to have a new tutor, so I would *have* that problem?" Adrian spoke aloud, foggy and not quite understanding the rationale behind.

"Dark Magic addiction is necessary for all practitioners of the dark arts," His father began without any sense of remorse, not that Adrian expected any.

"It is always worst at the start, harder to control with more effects and ramifications. As your magical core is still developing, having undergone and surpassed it will enable a higher level of tolerance for almost all spellwork you will encounter."

Adrian blinked, feeling slightly more welcome to ask questions with how…(dare he say it) *nice* the atmosphere was.

"You yourself experienced it then, Father?"

Voldemort tilted his head forward in a slight nod, "Correct. My Sixth Year when I attended Hogwarts."

"When you opened the Chamber." Adrian found himself speaking before he could stop himself.

"Correct," His father's eyes were glittering darkly like a multi-faceted garnet, "How does Adalonda fair?"

"Well, I mean she's well," Adrian stumbled over his words, yet he found himself smiling in memory of the great creature.

"She's, uh, very interesting, pleased to be awake." Adrian lamely finished, yet not feeling as uncomfortable as he once had.

"Excellent to hear," His father nodded slowly, dismissive although his eyes were fixed on Adrian with a deeply considering look. "I believe you said you intended to learn the Animagus transformation."

Adrian jolted slightly from where he sat, blinking quickly as he tried to manage anything beyond nodding stupidly.

His father tilted his head sideways slightly, "Then I grant you complete use of Wormtail, for undetermined time or until you see fit."

Adrian paused, "...Father?"

"Attempt it." Voldemort curtly added, once more his expression was impossible to read.

"I always felt the effort of such a transformation could be better spent on…" his father glanced behind Adrian, towards Nagini with something unspoken, "*better* things."

"Thank you." Adrian nodded, nearly choking on the words. He felt a slight pang against the dismissive treatment of the Animagus transformation, or how it was brushed aside for something more important.

Animagus transformation was important to him, and although he *knew that,* something shriveled painfully with how skeptical his father felt over it.

"Hogwarts- I mean, I have to return to school soon."

"You do," Voldemort agreed, tapping the lower edge of his jaw thoughtfully, "Perhaps you could take Wormtail along with you. I doubt you would manage to even decently progress in the time remaining."

That hurt, yet Adrian pushed through, "To Hogwarts? Where would…"

"The Chamber is beyond the boundaries of the school wards. As such, he will be undetected by wards or sight."

It wasn't a bad idea, although the Chamber was a rather horrid place to live, with the mold and dripping water.

Then again, it was only Wormtail.

"It would be perfect," Adrian breathed, nodding quickly, "Brilliant actually, is he-"

His father dismissively flicked his hand, "He is aware. Also, the first step for transformation is to place a mandrake leaf within your mouth for a month."

How...had his father already researched the transformation? Had he actually *investigated* it as an option at some point in the past?

That...that made his doubt so much more sharp and horrid in his throat.

Adrian swallowed harshly and his heart plummeted, "A.. a *month?"*

Adrian shouldn't have been surprised when his father casually summoned a small leaf, similar to a fresh tea leaf. The look in his eye was devious as he drew his wand and levitated it down the table, leaving it twirling just in front of Adrian's face.

It filled him with a sense of dread, as if he was facing a jar of noxious fumes.

"Obviously, I am aware of a spell to adhere it without interruption for the duration of the ritual."

Adrian exhaled slowly through his nose, "Yes father, thank you."

"Everything will taste of rosemary, of course."

Adrian's shoulders slumped, and he slid downwards in his seat with visible gloom.
"I *hate* Rosemary."

His father smirked viciously, "I know."

Daphne Greengrass sat in her room, tapping her quill against her lips as she once more scanned the roll of parchment she had opened and closed over and over.

It was a small thing, creased and fraying on the corners. Scratched handwriting she had carefully crossed out to replace with more refined penmanship.

She was a Greengrass, and as such she had the rightful duty to observe and evaluate all of her possible suitors, regardless of her age.

She was young, she knew that still. Yet, she'd rather have *all* the information in regards to her options, before coming to a hasty conclusion.

She *wanted* to know the dirty secrets, the serkets in the closets of her options. And if not for her, then to scrape out and hold leverage against anyone who could *possibly* hurt-

"Daphne?"

She smiled, lowering her quill to peer over her shoulder at her younger sister, exhausted and curious.

"Hello, Aster." She greeted happily, a small smile curling on her lips.

Astoria scowled something small, running one thin hand through her darker hair as she stumbled over to Daphne's desk, squinting at the parchment with a frown.

"That again?" She huffed, looking disgruntled yet slightly amused by the sight, "The bachelor list?"

Daphne rolled her eyes in good nature, "You'd be amazed at how pathetic your options are."

Astoria scowled, "You mean *your* options. I'm fine on my own."

Daphne smiled thinly, then genuinely as Astoria whined in frustration.

"Fine," She scoffed, leaning heavily on her older sister as she squinted at the names. Then she frowned, face relaxing and pinching in confusion, "Daphne, who is this one?"

Daphne didn't need to look to know which name she was pointing at- the name she had scribbled convoluted theories and facts over and over again.

"Selwyn?" Daphne asked dryly, already feeling the start of a headache, "The most *insufferable* male in all of Slytherin's house."

Astoria almost looked awed at how aggravated Daphne was, "Why?"

The gates were opened with such a quiet innocent question.

"He's so…" Daphne's face twisted ugly, "He's *unbearable.* He's arrogant, conceited, reclusive and narcissistic and and...and so...*impossible!"*

Astoria's face twitched slightly into a sly grin, "Sounds like *someone* has thought of this a *lot-"*

"He's the one who sent Bulstrode on fire," She snapped out sharply, voice nearing a growl.

Astoria's face paled and she smile fell quickly from her mouth, "...oh, *he's* the one?"

Daphne scowled and rubbed at her temple with an ugly sound, "He's slipped accidental information constantly- but it keeps contradicting itself."

Astoria frowned, "Want me to look?"

"No." Daphne snapped, her jaw nearly grinding together, "You're not going *near* him-"

"You don't know how to slip inside his head," Astoria protested with a pout.

"You're *barely* adept." Daphne snapped back, "I'm nearly positive he's an occlumens."

Astoria paused, "Why would he need to learn that?"

"So people like *you* don't go poking around with your grubby fingers." Daphne scoffed, snatching her quill to brush the fluffy tip in her sister's face.

The question still hung in the air, stifling and heavy between them.

Why would someone need to know Occlumancy? Especially at that age?

"What do you know about him?" Astoria asked softly, reaching out with thin fingers to twist and play with Daphne's hair, "What's his blood status? His family?"

Daphne breathed through her nose, "I don't know."

Astoria's fingers stilled a few seconds, "that's unlike you."

"It's true," Daphne admitted sour, "He's adopted, and he's not a Pureblood, or at least he was adopted by some house who has no pride or no name."

"Are you sure? Or is he hiding his name?" Astoria asked curiously, beginning the movements of a french braid, "I haven't heard of a Selwyn."

"Adopted by a not Pureblood family, he doesn't care for his name."

Astoria hummed, working her hands carefully over and over, "Are you sure? Maybe that's the reason you haven't heard of it."

Daphne shook her head, nearly dislodging her sister's fingers, "No Pureblood family would *dare* adopt something impure into the family!"

Astoria sniffed, "Maybe he wasn't adopted?"

Daphne worried her lip, "No, there was a boggart, in my second year. It...There was resemblance. I met him on the train platform, it was the same man."

"Let me see?" Astoria asked quietly, tapping Daphne's head just behind her ear.

Daphne smiled, and turned, locking silvery eyes with her sister, who tilted her head ever so slightly.

A second passed, then two and Astoria looked just as confused as before.

"I don't understand," Astoria blinked wide eyed and oh so innocent, "He's adopted? Through a blood ritual?"

Daphne gave a curt nod, "He let it slip he had a brother- but from which family? From before? *After?*"

Astoria blinked wide eyed and cynically aware, "You've been talking to Suzie Forestar."

Daphne whacked Astoria's arm, "Stay out of her head."

Astoria shrugged but didn't look regretful, "I wondered what you were doing, you wouldn't talk to me at school."

Daphne didn't feel bad, and Astoria didn't look that upset.

"I don't understand," Astoria confessed, trailing her brown hair between thin bony fingers, "He...this...Selwyn, he's adopted? And mentioned he has a brother?"

"*Yes,* it's why he's so confusing." Daphne admitted.

Astoria blinked, "I don't see why you're thinking that his birth family is dead?"

Daphne paused, and her jaw dropped slightly with a small gasp.

She snatched her quill, and began to write.

The train ride back was uneventful, and swift.

The Great Hall, was exactly opposite of such.

Once seated and the newest first years sorted, a great chaotic influx of people appeared through dazzling displays of intimidation and grace.

Triwizard Tournament, Adrian was amazed that Remus didn't warn him ahead of time of such a spectacle.

(Then again, perhaps he would have if he stayed.)

Adrian almost forgot that he had been 'kidnapped' and taken to the side. Only after the two new schools had thoroughly mingled did Adrian remember.

Skylar in particular looked gobsmacked, catching eyes with him across the distance of the Great Hall. Skylar nudged Hermione sharply, drawing her attention and pointing.

She gasped silently, eyes widening as she conveyed the largest sense of guilt possible through her gaze.

Remus maybe mourned, or assumed the worst.

Once the students were dismissed and people began to file out, Adrian hurried through the halls to

try and escape any sort of scene created by the golden trio.

Unfortunately, he hadn't considered Draco wanting a word, especially considering the last time he had seen the blonde.

Adrian scrambled down a corridor, taking sharp turns and fearfully hoping he would be far enough away from the main masses before he was so vocally questioned. He heard shoes racing after him, feet slapping on the floor loudly and Hermione's wordless cries to hurry.

Adrian ran one hand through his hair and spun. He could see the sunset through a nearby large stained glass window.

He shifted his weight, standing solid as he waited in preparation for the three. If he was going to be attacked, best that *he* determine the setting.

The golden trio spun around the corner, flushed and panting with how hurried they were to keep pace. That surprised Adrian, hadn't Skylar received any extensive training? *At all?*

"Adrian!" Skylar gasped out, wheezing although looking more composed than the other two," You're *alive,* mate!"

Adrian stared, he hadn't expected the confrontation to begin like that. "Brilliant deduction."

Ron flushed red and opened his mouth to argue, only for Hermione to jump forward and throw her arms around him.

"We thought you were gone!" She gasped in relief, "Or worse!"

"Remus was in rough shape, mate." Skylar looked miserable, worrying his lower lip anxiously, "We searched those fields for *days* after."

No, you didn't.

"Yeah, nothing there but rubble." Ron nodded attentively, "How are you alive!"

Adrian twitched as Hermione clutched him tighter, "Adrian Selwyn! Never do that to us again!" She threatened, pulling away only to whack her hand on his upper bicep viciously, "Thinking that those... those-"

"Death Eaters," Skylar helpfully provided.

"Death Eaters!" Hermione parroted, jumping back into her furious rant, "-got you! Thinking that *Bellatrix Lestrange* got you! She was *there* you know! We heard reports from the aurors, Sirius says himself that *he saw her* there!"

Adrian scowled, glaring at Skylar who went so far to place one arm on his unoccupied shoulder.

"I know," Adrian grit out sourly, hands spasming into a fist "She was *looking* for me."

There was a sudden pause at his bold declaration.

"Blimey mate," Ron muttered confused and amazed, "I think my mother's looney but that Lestrange really takes the cake. Must be awful, her being your mum and all."

Adrian's cheek twitched, "I got Lutain back. I'm fine. Can I go now?"

Skylar looked as if he had been smacked, "the familiar? You got that snake back?"

"Are you though?" Hermione gushed worriedly, ignoring the bit that Skylar was stuck on. "Fine?"

Adrian scowled sourly, "*Yes,* now I have to go."

He pushed past, not looking back even as Hermione called after him. Adrian knew that they would contact Remus, who would likely send him an owl. All Adrian truly wanted was to go back to the common room, get Wormtail out of his trunk and head down to greet Adalonda once more.

He slipped down the staircases heading towards the dungeons, his footsteps echoing through the hallways. There was something empowering about the way his heels clicked against the stone. Echoing, resounding against and off the walls.

He entered the main room, heading towards his room determinedly.

"Adrian!" Theo called from the couches, "Draco was just in, he said he wanted to talk to you-"

Adrian ignored him and opened his door, shrugging off his outer cloak to through on the nearest chair. He wasn't in the mood to talk, he just wanted to *get* the filthy rat...

"Lutain-" Adrian cut off sharply, swallowing his words before anything else spilled out.

Well, Theo *had* warned him.

Draco shifted how he sat, posed carefully with his chin tilted ever so slightly. He looked more regal, poised as he perched on the edge of Theo's bed, directly across from Adrian in the doorway.

"Adrian," Draco greeted coldly, his face blank yet just slightly shimmering with anger, "Or should I call you Adrian Lestrange?"

Adrian paused, blinking, and letting the curse slip from his lips crudely, "Bollocks."

Moon

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian returns to school, Remus is emotional, and Thestrals stare.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to all of my Beta's and all of you wonderful fans who leave me comments.

There was a new professor at Hogwarts that was both an enigma and an absolute horror for Adrian.

His name was Professor Moody, or Mad-Eye-Moody as most of the Slytherin's were murmuring unsurely to one another. An experienced Auror, a dark wizard catcher, a *lunatic.* Apparently a high percentage of wizards and witches imprisoned in Azkaban were due to the one man alone.

Moody unnerved Adrian scarily so, especially with the Ex-Auror's blatant disregard for school rules and punishments.

Professor Moody displayed the three Unforgivable Curses with terrifying ease.

Adrian hadn't ever attempted the curses; they were the darkest spells he knew. He didn't even know the incantations for them (well, he hadn't before.)

Dark Magic addiction would be overwhelming, it would have left him immobile and writhing against it.

Yet this teacher didn't even flinch, he didn't even *grin.*

That was a horrible sign if there was one.

Draco had been...different.

Very different.

Admittedly, it was Adrian's fault that he had slipped away too obviously. Word had spread as rumor tended to.

Granted, Adrian *had* thought that the rumors with Bellatrix would have lasted a bit longer, that the secret would have remained hidden for a bit longer in time.

For the Order and for word to so carelessly fall into the hands of children, well, obviously there was a spy within his Father's ranks, or within the Order.

(Not only that, but the spy fell for something as simple as *irrelevant information,* Adrian was almost disappointed.)

Draco was angry, a seething fury that was restrained by fear and the knowledge that Adrian very likely could (and would) attack him.

Draco believed that Adrian would send him to the Hospital Wing unrecognizable, Adrian knew that he could.

(Would he? No, not when more things were at stake. Not when he was being watched by so *many eyes.)*

Draco found a way to combat this new threat, in the standard Malfoy name. His name carried weight in a way Adrian hadn't truly realized before.

The influence and power of Draco's standings, and his new ignorance policy he implemented towards Adrian absolutely *demolished* Adrian's dealings.

Hopefully when the tournament began, the selected champions would need assistance or some sort of help with spells. The galleon's he had saved were quickly running low, scraping the bottom of the cauldron as he recklessly purchased useless quills or new potions for Lutain's scales without halt.

For now, he was withholding his spending and hoping for some sort of demand of his services.

Until then, and until the weather plummeted to even colder outside, Adrian was perfectly content to spend his time outside with Lutain sitting along the lake. The giant squid was enough company as it was.

Adrian skipped the announcement for the Hogwarts Champion and the Champions of the other schools. It wasn't yet too late for a walk, too many people and too many eyes on him still unnerved him.

Not to mention the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons students tended to stare at Adrian. They would stop, or take a double glance to follow him as he walked across the courtyards. Sometimes he was lucky to be out of hearing range before they started whispering,

(*'What's wrong with him?'*

'Why is he alone?'

'Hah! Look at how disgusting!'

'Don't look, Mari, he'll see you-')

Adrian wasn't quite used to his reflection yet either.

"Adrian!"

The boy in question spun on his heels, jolting at the noise. His change in movement nearly threw Lutain from his shoulders.

"Remus?" Adrian blinked in surprise, overwhelmed when he was suddenly taken into the man's arms and hugged quite fiercely.

He was fortunately outside near Hagrid's hut, far enough nobody saw the man embrace him.

"Oh thank Merlin," Remus exhaled, clutching the younger boy close, "Skylar sent an owl saying that you were alright; I-I couldn't come until today you see, sneaking in with the family group for the champions."

"What…" Adrian blinked, struggling to understand what was going on, "What do you…"

Lutain took that moment to hiss, the sound was muffled from under the clothing but the thrashing couldn't be disguised. Remus loosened his arms, relaxing them from where they had constricted to a twinging pain. His torso shook slightly, a hitch in his breath as if he was sick.

"Oh!" Remus pulled back, peering down quizzically before his expression changed to beaming, "Ah! Your familiar! Are you alright, little one?"

He addressed Lutain directly. something which baffled the snake.

"Yes?" Lutain hissed curiously in response, almost expecting the werewolf to speak back.

Remus didn't, and instead smiled far too overjoyed for Adrian to comprehend. What on Earth made him so *happy?*

"May we talk?" Remus asked politely, his expression shifting into something serious, although the light never did fade from his eyes. The two walked towards the forest, taking a small path around the hut into the woods where a small lake rested shrouded by trees.

"I would generally never take a student into these woods, although we both know we're well versed with magical creatures."

Remus' slightly sarcastic drawl caused Adrian to smile faintly without his knowledge. He reached out his hand to brush against the thick bark of the ancient trees, "That's true."

Remus smiled, taking a seat on a large boulder just shy of the small lake's lapping edges.

Adrian wondered mutedly if the werewolf was at all aware that this was the same lake he had threatened to crash through the last year, scrabbling at the frozen edge and howling into the night.

Lutain bit James Potter that day, and Adrian nearly killed him.

Adrian flinched.

"So," Remus began, looking hesitant yet curious and worried, "I as well as a few others want to know all of what happened in your absence."

"A few others?" Adrian asked with a frown, crossing his arms sourly and in a defensive posture.

Remus smiled, looking at Adrian fondly as he shook his head in good nature.

"The headmaster," Remus admitted, fingers twitching and tracing imaginary patterns on the boulder, "He was intending to talk to you directly, but ah, since you two haven't been introduced Albus thought you may feel...intimidated."

That clarified a few questions Adrian had.

"Intimidated," Adrian repeated, quietly under his breath with a scoff. Remus heard, and he turned away quickly to hide his affectionate smile at how annoyed Adrian sounded.

"Alright," Adrian settled carefully. He shifted, moving to sit on the nearest rock. Lutain uncoiled,

sliding down to peer and spot minnows swimming in the shallow water.

"What happened? At the World Cup." Remus asked quietly, his good mood evaporating and leaving the air brittle and cold.

Adrian stared out over the water of the secluded lake, he could almost imagine the snow, the broken ice and the shrieking- *"James! Help me!"*

He blinked, and saw water once more. "I was separated. Bellatrix had Lutain with her, so I couldn't do much else but agree to go with her."

Remus for his credit didn't say anything.

Adrian ducked his head, plucking at a small stone nestled in a groove of his boulder, "So we went home, and then I came here."

Remus leant forward, resting his chin on his knee with a frown. "Did she curse you?"

"No," Adrian denied with almost a smile, "She...she was mad, before. Azkaban changed her, it was easy to distract her."

Remus flinched at that and shook his head, "I'm so sorry- I should have tried harder. I'm so sorry that…"

"Don't be, I have Lutain again." Adrian glanced at his friend, smiling as the snake snapped and tried to catch a fish. It was fruitless, and instead left his friend playing in the shallows, warmed by the sun.

"I... I was told, to ask if you had…" Remus paused and tried to summon his words. He wrinkled his nose, looking annoyed or offended by whatever he had been tasked to ask Adrian.

It wasn't that hard to guess.

"If I overheard anything, about the attack. About why she did it or…" Adrian's eyes darkened, "About You-Know-Who?"

Remus looked pained, and furious with himself. "Albus' request, of course, I think it's shite."

Adrian blinked in surprise and confusion, "I...pardon?"

Remus rolled his eyes, still looking agitated but somehow undeniably *happy,* "You're here. I don't care how in Merlin's name you're alright, but I'm *so, so thankful* that you're alright."

Remus paused, before reaching out and gently taking Adrian's arm, clutching his hand between his two palms as if it was chalice holding an antidote to a poison.

"I am so glad you're alright," Remus spoke, voice hoarse and pinched yet his eyes were wide and undeniably *honest.*

Adrian swallowed the lump in his throat, and struggled to speak words, "I- Bella. She didn't say anything about it, or- or about He-Who-Should-Not-Be-Named."

Remus didn't care, and instead shook his head gently.

"This is my fault…"

"No, It isn't. It wasn't awful either, besides," Adrian's eyes were faintly sharp, "Don't you have Potter to worry over?"

"I have plenty of time to worry about Skylar. Allow me to worry over you right now. How are classes? Not too difficult?"

Adrian looked taken aback once more, "No, er, not yet. I'm part of the Advanced Care Classes."

"I've heard, Hagrid speaks all about you. Are you aiming for a career with magical creatures?"

Adrian paused thoughtfully, feeling almost suspicious with Remus' curiosity. "Maybe. I never considered far into the future."

Remus smiled, his teeth were white but his canine teeth were slightly pronounced. "I heard that Charlie Weasley is visiting soon, he's a keeper over in Romania at a Dragon Reserve.
I'm *positive* the boy would love to talk with you, it's not every day someone can hold their own against him."

Lutain snapped loudly and struggled. His body flailed, coiled half hazardously around a silvery body, struggling to hold on.

"Blasted worm!" Lutain cursed around the slimy fish scales in his jaws.

Remus laughed, watching the display fondly, "I see why you care so much for him. He is quite the character, I never truly understood the desire for a snake. I've been missing out."

Remus' eyes were twinkling and alight with something gentle and kind, warm and sweet like melted honey.

"You can owl me for anything you need, Adrian. I'll make it up to you."

Adrian blinked slowly and watched Lutain flounder and get coated in the dark brown mud of the shore.

"I know, I just...I do things on my own." Adrian paused, trying to elaborate but struggling with the words.

"Ah, I know how you feel." Remus smiled slightly, something nostalgic and yet so terribly pained, "We all have our own burdens to carry."

Adrian felt the press of Nagini beneath his skin.

Some burdens weighed a bit too much for even him to carry.

(Remus told him that he visited with James and Lily, sneaking in along with Sirius under some sort of loophole in Ministry regulations. He was there for the family visitation for the Champions.

Skylar was the Champion.

Remus' visit suddenly confused Adrian more than anything in his life- why would the Werewolf spend his visitation with *Adrian?* And not *Skylar?*

Nothing was making sense anymore.)

Hedwig returned to Hogwarts when Lupin visited. He had a paper with her, an official inquiry from the Headmaster although it was null and voice now he had talked to Lupin.

Hedwig cooed and clicked her beak happily, hopping from perch to perch within the owlery. He stashed bits of bacon from his breakfast; he fed her pieces between pets along her feathers.

"What a pretty bird," A chiming voice complimented, the owner of which skipped into the owlry smoothly.

Adrian turned, encountering a girl who looked achingly familiar.

"She's well trained," The stranger smiled, eyes such a light colour they looked almost blind, "you care for your animals a lot, don't you?"

Adrian paused, "I'm sorry, have we met before?"

"We have," She hummed, and then moved to a large grey owl that looked somewhat in a dazed state.

Adrian waited, and she didn't care to actually introduce or elaborate.

"My name is Adrian Selwyn," he introduced, offering his hand graciously for her knuckles. She obliged, skipping over and placing her knuckles in his grasp.

"How polite," She beamed, the expression somewhat disconcerting with her vacant eyes, "You're different from the rumors."

"And what do the rumors say?"

"Oh all sort of nasty things." she hummed, shaking her head and rattling her broken quill earrings. It was a miracle they didn't scratch the delicate skin of her neck.

She twirled away once again, silver and blue scarf slapping him across his cheeks.

"They say that you deal all sorts of illegal things. They say you poisoned people, that you were born from a Banshee and you drink blood at midnight." She giggled over the words, as if it was something hilarious.

"You seem to be alright with me," Adrian slowly added, watching her movements as she pulled out a strange piece of meat- was that a mouse's *head?* She tossed it to the grey owl, smiling as it snatched it greedily.

"Of course I am, they call me crazy too." She blinked wide eyed and gave a sparklingly large smile, "Would you like to feed thestrals with me?"

Adrian opened his jaw, closed it, then opened it again.

"You know," Adrian struggled to think, "I have had a strange week. I would love to."

"Great," She tilted her head dizzily, "They don't like turnips though, at least I don't think they do."

"What's your name?" Adrian asked curiously, finding this strange girl much more amusing than the others who always looked at him afraid or disgusted.

"Luna Lovegood, although people call me Looney."

"People think I drink blood," Adrian mused out loud, offering one hand politely.
Luna *beamed,* grabbing his hand and skipping towards the door that led outside. She moved far too fast for walking, so Adrian was forced to stumble after nearly running.

"I like you," She grinned, sunlight catching her hair and making her entire complexion seem ethereal, "Although you don't look like an Adrian to me. Maybe a Demitri, or a Harold."

Adrian smiled a bit pinched, "You look like a Maria then."

She giggled knowingly, "No I don't, but thank you. I can't wait to tell my father I've made a friend. He's the author of the Quibbler, you know."

A friend?

Luna stopped him at the bottom of the owlry, pointing out how a small wildflower meant that Doxies were in the area. Adrian thought there was absolutely no truth to this, but she only smiled and kept chatting about things that either was irrelevant or too relevant for her to know.

(*"Not a Harold, maybe a Harrison? No, not that either, or at least you look like you outgrew it. Maybe you should be named Cedric like the Hogwart's Champion. I'd help you change your name you know."*

"I'm happy with my name, Luna."

"You are? Ah, I must have been thinking about Blibbersnouts again then.")

The thestrals were hidden far into the forest, yet Luna did not falter once in her steps. She ran and jumped, twirled over dangerous dips or hidden roots ready to trip her. She was graceful in a hazardous way, yet still managed to clumsily stumble over her own feet and drop into a bush.

She laughed, pointing up through the reaching branches to the sunlight and described the green as the colour of a newborn Morscarbury pup. Adrian had never heard of something like that.

The thestrals were found, a large herd that no doubt pulled the carriages every year.

"Hello!" Luna chimed, reaching out towards the largest one and running her fingers over the bony protrusions of its spine, "I brought a friend with me! I hope you don't mind."

The thestrals turned their milky eyes on him and wheezed a rattling breath.

"Hello," Adrian waved to them, finding the surreal silence of their movements somehow calming.

A foal (were they called foals?) stumbled up to him, legs shaking under the exertion of running over. Adrian reached down to pet it, only to stop when one thestral chuffed loudly in protest. He froze, waiting for the strange child to butt its head against his palm.

"They don't mind you," Luna chimed up, staring at him without blinking, "But they aren't unsure. You've done things, and they don't like it."

"Pardon?"

"They think it's sad. Are you sad, Adrian?"

Was he?

"No, of course I'm not." He heard himself responding, the words listless and numb in his mouth.

Luna hummed, gently running her hand along the neck of the large thestral that was staring at Adrian so attentively.

"Curious things, thestrals. People think they're dark, but truly they're misunderstood. Only those who have seen death can see them, I think it's so you understand them. Imagine how horrid if everyone could see them, why, the ministry would hunt them right out."

The young thestral finally but its head against Adrian's hand, letting him run his fingers down the knobbly spine of its back.

"Would you like to know a secret?" Luna asked curiously, reaching into her side pocket and fishing out suspicious clumps of severed rat heads.

Luna leant forward consolingly, eyes wide and milky like the thestrals'.

"I heard that thestrals never mate, and never have young," She began, smoothing over the fur of one rat head lovingly.

"Then how…"

The young thestral chirped curiously.

"I think thestrals are all children at heart," she giggled happily, "they are. Children who die the most horrid, awful ways; children who die in such a way that thestrals cry for them. So curious why that one likes you, it's only a few years old."

Adrian's blood froze, and his hand stiffened on the spine of the curious creature.

Luna noticed, and she smiled something soft and sad.

"You know, I think you'd be a wonderful thestral." She smiled, and turned back to the larger beast next to her.

They didn't stop staring at him.

Dragons

Chapter Summary

Where Wormtail arrives, Draco presses until something snaps, and Adrian watches fire.

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year Everyone!

The Chamber of Secrets was vast. It never ceased to amaze Adrian every time just how far his echoing footsteps rang. Interspersed with the occasional hollow drip, humidity seeping through his cloak until it chilled his skin.

Despite the eerie atmosphere, Adrian walked over the expanse with no worry. He halted his steps, peering at a few of the stone statues of various serpents curiously. He hadn't ever investigated the statues; the craftsmanship was impressive.

"Adalonda!" Adrian called out cheerfully, his hisses reverberating like hundreds of whispers. *"I've returned!"*

"Great serpent!" Lutain crowed in turn, flicking his tongue wildly in the musty air. Despite the location and the cold, Lutain always looked happiest in the chamber.

The tunnels and clearing remained empty, dark and thrumming silently with pulses of something ancient. Adalonda was clearly not there, which was somewhat a disappointment.

Adrian frowned, allowing his disappointment to bubble obviously as his lip twitched into something of a pout. He wanted to talk to the serpent, especially since it had been so long since he had seen her last.

Realistically it was foolish to assume she stayed in the Chamber of Secrets all the time, especially with how the tunnels opened to the Forbidden Forest or even further. It was childish of him to assume and be annoyed when she didn't come at his single beckon.

"Ah well," Adrian sighed, trying to dispel his frustration as he looked at the box in his hands, rattling slightly in his grip. The box was a recycled one which had held a pack of Pumpkin Pastries, although the squeaking inside signified there was certainly no sweets in it anymore.

The box Adrian was holding squeaked incessantly.

Lutain scoffed sourly when the giant basilisk failed to appear, although he seemed to be in calmer spirits.

"Set down rat and practice." Lutain sulked, although the two of them had agreed on the plan prior to venturing down.

Adrian did so, setting the spare box on the cold ground and lifting the lid to remove the sticking charm.

Immediately a large rat sprang out and darted across the floor, pausing a few feet away with one leg in a puddle and his nose twitching incessantly.

"Shift back," Adrian ordered with a small frown, twisting and incantating a light charm, allowing the peals of sunlight to permeate the vaporous mist in the shadowed corners.

The rat squealed, scrabbling across the ground as it could see so much better. Its scaly tail, completely unlike Lutain's, thrashed across the ground.

Adrian felt the prickle of annoyance as he pointed his wand at the rat; it froze.

"Change back or I *will* force you, Wormtail." Adrian seethed between clenched teeth.

"Should have just bit him," Lutain sighed wistfully.

The rat's flesh bubbled, morphing and twisting before it exploded outwards and began to reform. It was by no means attractive, and quite horrendous. Adrian had seen Sirius Black shift into his dog form once or twice, the movement for that was smooth and almost mystifying to watch. Even James Potter seemed to *leap* into his transformation, not having any unsettling midway.

Wormtail was a hunkered mass of distorted skin and gory details, something Adrian wrinkled his nose at. The man whimpered, it was testament to the hideous visage that Adrian could not tell if the whimper was from pain or fear.

Wormtail curled down on himself, anxiously lifting his gnarled fingers towards his mouth. His fingernails were brittle and shattered.

"Wormtail," Adrian smiled thinly, "This is the Chamber of Secrets."

The man's eyes widened in horror as he began to choke out stuttered sounds. Adrian ignored them.

"You'll be staying here, as part of my orders. You won't be detected by the school wards here, not to mention there is plenty of room."

"Tell him about Adalonda!" Lutain hissed excitedly, lounging about contently.

"Of course, do not bother the basilisk and you'll get along swimmingly."

"*Basilisk?"* The cowering man shrieked, eyes bulging obscenely, "You- you're leaving me here with a *basilisk?*"

"Oh, I'm sorry my father's accommodations for you aren't gilded in gold and ivory." Adrian snapped out, feeling a primal sense of satisfaction when Wormtail paled and flinched at the idea, "Obviously, if you teach me the transformation faster, the sooner you'll be out of here."

Wormtail pawed his fingers, folding them over and over as if to soothe himself.

"I still need to have the leaf in my mouth for another week," Adrian added informatively," The piping system is elaborate here- the wards will not detect you until you leave the pipes. There's plenty of water, and I'm sure you'll find food somehow. Try not to look at the Basilisk in the eye, will you?"

"I will wait for Adalonda!" Lutain added, excited and pleased to speak to the mighty serpent once

more. Adrian nodded slightly, turning to walk away with a hop in his step.

"W-wait!" Wormtail shrieked behind him, making movements to follow, "Where- how. My wand?"

"You think I'm a moron?" Adrian looked at him incredulously, "Your wand is back at the manor, I'm not letting you get out of here and blow my cover. If you even *try* running, I'll have the basilisk hunt you down. Am I *understood?"*

Wormtail paused, jaw dropping in surprise and indignation at the threatening response. Something must have crossed his face, or some sort of epiphany struck the rat like a club over his head. Wormtail snapped his jaw shut; his nostrils flared and his eyes stared wide in something like anger.

"You're just a-" Wormtail's words were vicious, stewing and angry.

Lutain hissed threatening, sliding to the ground carefully and sending Wormtail reeling as if shocked.

Adrian watched the man carefully, feeling inexplicably unsettled, "...Lutain, keep watch."

Wormtail scowled and shifted into his rat with the noise of joints and bones snapping and wet skin squelching. With nary a sound, the man skittered off to the darkest corner he could find.

Draco Malfoy was a self-centered prick that neither understood his place, and knew his place in the wizarding world all too well.

Draco *knew* that in a standard fight, he would almost certainly lose. Despite that, the act of attacking or targeting Draco would result in swarms of masses then attacking the *attacker* for days if not weeks afterwards. You could win a fight against Draco, but you would *never* win in combat.

With that in mind, Draco was overconfident for his own wellbeing, too sure that his fans and other ambitious classmates would take a curse for him without a second thought. This made him both interesting, and aggravating at the same time. A princely child ready to throw a tantrum the moment a warm body disagreed with his ideas.

The fact that Adrian himself had withheld not only information, but *relevant* information was both impossible to comprehend and a grievous error in Draco's mind. *Why* would anyone fail to inform him that they were (distantly) *related* to him?

And in the unique self-centered way the Malfoy's possessed, Draco took it as a personal slight which only further caused tension both in and out of the common room.

Adrian slipped into the common room, carefully. He had full intentions of heading straight to his room to start on the first assignment of the year assigned to him by Hagrid for Care; he was exhausted, especially after dealing with Wormtail.

He made it only halfway to his room when he heard the first snide comment from Draco, aimed directly at him from the couches he always shared. Adrian should have ignored it- he *should have.* Lutain would have told him to keep walking, except Lutain was keeping watch in the Chamber to inform Adalonda of the situation.

There was nobody to tell him to *not* respond to Draco, and plenty of eyes watching, silently begging him *to* respond.

"Looking a bit peckish, Selwyn? Then again, you always looking a bit foul."

Against his better judgement he turned on his heel and looked directly at Draco, observing his tight jaw and flinty eyes.

"Not as foul as your temper, Malfoy." He found himself saying, already striding over to the couches where his other Slytherin yearmates were accommodating room, "What's wrong, Granger already show you up?"

Draco's jaw shifted, and his hand curled into a fist. Dozens of eyes were watching, too curious for their own good.

"You're the one hanging around Mudbloods," Draco's eyes narrowed pointedly, "What would mummy think with such filth?"

And there it was.

Daphne straightened slightly, drawing an ear to the conversation. Theo shifted unsure with how tense the atmosphere was.

"Draco…" Theo trailed off unsure, not liking where the conversation was escalating; he likely wasn't liking how chances were, he'd have to break up a fight very soon.

"I wouldn't care," Adrian hummed calmly, smiling something bordering on feral as something harshly raged *how dare he*. With one hand, Adrian tapped along his jaw right where he could feel a raised border of mutilated skin, "*Mummy* isn't very fond of me."

Draco's nostrils flared- ah, Adrian could see where the boy misinterpreted Adrian's careless retort as a slight against both Bellatrix and thus, Draco's family.

"I wouldn't be either, especially now that you associate with Blood Traitors and *Potters,* or were you simply living with them because nobody else *wanted you?"*

Adrian's yearmates inhaled sharply and shifted away from him. Draco looked victorious in the way his knuckles relaxed and his shoulders rolled slowly.

Control yourself. Control yourself.

Adrian exhaled slowly through his nose, "Careful, Draco. You're looking jealous."

The blonde flushed angrily but Adrian didn't stick around long enough to hear the rebuttal. He had a Care essay to work on, not to mention he had to find some sort of way to gather the shreds of his background story to try and twist this in his way.

(He chose to ignore the way how three students and Theo all had wands hidden under their books, pointed at his back.)

"Be quick," Adrian whispered, gently smoothing his thumb over a stray feather which stuck out near Hedwig's eye. She affectionately clicked her beak, her glaring eyes somehow calm. She spread her wings, flapping twice with an audible clap. She ascended, white wings flapping away into the afternoon sky and out of sight.

Adrian admittedly didn't understand the Triwizard Tournament. It wasn't something he had heard of before, through whispers in the walls or Nagini's hisses. It seemed unplanned, random and a

variable he didn't know anything about.

It was possible the entire scenario was a twisted form of chance, an ironic twist that somehow was not related whatsoever.

Yet, that *still* didn't address how Skylar got his name in the cup; the ward was cast by the Headmaster himself so evidently a very powerful curse breaker or wizard would be needed to befuddle the cup.

Perhaps father is involved, and he thought you too useless to be of help.

Adrian left the tower, shuffling through his bag to make sure he had his finished essay for Care. Lutain peered up sleepily from his bag, mumbling nonsense before he drifted back off to sleep.

Adrian shook his head and smiled affectionately at his friend, making sure not to jostle him too badly as he traveled across the stone pathways.

The sky was overcast but still bright, a few birds flew overhead and tittered happily despite the quickly approaching chill in the air. Not too many students were outside, especially since the tournament had quickly offered new classes for this year with a mixture of new subject topics.

Adrian descended stairs towards Hagrid's hut, pausing in his steps when he saw Skylar Potter walking alone down towards the same building. What was more unusual, was the mediocre job he was doing at hiding behind the stone obelisks, staying low to the ground.

Skylar on his own was abnormal, generally his two lackeys followed him closely and stuck to his every movement. Given with this new behavior, Adrian instantly was curious and suspicious as to what he was doing.

Adrian followed a fair distance away, tilting his head as he spotted Draco emerging from the forest at some point and heading up towards the castle.

Skylar was following Draco? What was Draco doing in the forest in the first place?

The two spotted each other, and with the grace of two wolves preparing for battle they drew their wands and shouted words Adrian couldn't hear over the distance.

Adrian drew closer, pulling out his own wand when he saw the first flash of a red stunner.

He shouldn't interfere, mostly because he didn't entirely know the situation. Why was Malfoy on his own, unprotected near the Forbidden Forest? Why was Skylar following him to begin with? Where was Skylar's own crowd of people, and *why* had they began attacking almost instantaneously.

Then again...Draco was *alone,* and spells were already flying.

Nobody would be around to stop you, or witness.

Adrian worried his bottom lip, already feeling himself become persuaded to the concept of flinging a few curses. After all, nobody except Skylar was around to see it.

Malfoy needs to know that he won't always be protected.

Adrian gently removed Lutain and his shoulder bag, resting it carefully near the base of a stone obelisk. He advanced, pressing his back to the rock as a misguided spell singed the grass with a

blue smoke.

Just one curse. Maybe two.

Adrian exhaled through his nose calmly, and stepped to the side and into visible range.

Draco saw him first, jolting in surprise with Adrian's appearance. Evidently, he hadn't expected anyone to intrude on the mock duel, both participants were looking worse for wear.

Skylar looked behind him in confusion, nearly stumbling with Adrian's sudden appearance, "Adrian!"

Draco glared, lip curling back angrily, as if Skylar's acknowledgement suddenly confirmed that Adrian was in fact real. "Stay *out* of this Selwyn!"

"Oi! Don't talk to him like that!"

"What, all chummy with *Potter*, Selwyn?"

Adrian's cheek twitched as he brandished his wand, "I'll be honest; I am sick of *both of you.*"

Draco snarled, "Time to teach you some *manners,* titillando!"

Adrian twisted to avoid the clear hex, eyes widening at the action. He didn't think Draco would lash out so quickly, he had anticipated a monologue.

Adrian's jaw tightened and he brandished his wand sourly. If that was what he wanted.

Skylar shouted in protest, shooting off a stunner at Malfoy who took cover behind a rock.

Hagrid or a teacher would notice all the spells being fired, they weren't exactly being subtle.

"Langlock!" Skylar snapped out, nearly hitting Draco when he peered out from the stone.

"Flipendo!" Malfoy snarled, shooting off the jinx twice at both Adrian and Skylar.

It caught Adrian off guard, hitting his leg and knocking him back onto a decently sized rock protrusion on the side of the hill. The breath was knocked out of him soundly, leaving him wheezing and blinking spots from his vision. He had idiotically thought that Draco would go for one of them, not *both.*

Merlin, Adrian was performing mediocre in a fight against *Draco.* No wonder his father had...had left him in the *dark.*

His temper snapped and he dragged himself to his knees and glared at Draco, if possible his eyesight would have been tinted red.

Draco paused, and his breath hitched as he realized what was about to unfold.

Adrian snarled out a minor curse, something that his father had struck him with when he had been particularly snarky over lunch. The curse spread like a wave, smacking both Draco and Skylar. It rang like two boulders crashing, knocking them to the ground and where they clutched their legs in pain. Adrian twitched, feeling the spasms of dark magic tingle over his arms like pins and needles.

Adrian dragged himself upright, limping over the distance with heavy infuriated pants of breath.

"You two are being *ridiculous,"* he hissed out furiously. Glaring at the paling Draco who just now seemed to be understanding the ramifications of his attack.

"He started it…" Skylar protested, growing quiet when Adrian pointed his wand between Skylar's eyes.

You should send a blasting curse. Blow his skull to shrapnel.

Kill him.

"I should bloody stun *both* of you, and leave you here." Adrian spat angrily, his entire body trembling "now smarten up or for Merlin's sake I will curse you two until you can't even *think."*

Draco's jaw clicked, "Bite me, *filth."*

Adrian yanked his arm back and smashed it forward, clipping Draco's neck with his fist. He recoiled and struck again, twice, three times, over and over until the repetitive and fast frequency of his blows made up for the sloppy form.

He didn't know a spell that he could cast- a curse that was allowed on the Hogwarts grounds that was *fitting* for the boy. So, he punched, until Draco had keeled over and then he was kicking with his dragon scale boots that always clicked a bit more than other shoes.

There was something horrifyingly satisfying about kicking and hitting something pliant and giving. Something obscenely muggle and crude about it all, but so positively *wonderful.*

Until Skylar Potter managed to get to his feet, legs stinging and trembling under his weight, and he tackled Adrian to the ground.

"-at's *enough!"* Skylar panted, in obvious pain although not from tackling the taller boy the ground. Adrian grunted, feeling the weight of the other boy as they sprawled onto the grass.

Draco was whimpering quietly, curling fetal and twitching slightly from the pathetic pile he resembled.

"Merlin," Skylar winced, looking thinly at Adrian although trying admirably to smile and seem calm, "Bloody nasty jinx that was. Come on, I think Hagrid can get you something for that."

Skylar pointed at Adrian's face. He swiped against his cheek, looking at surprise at the tiny flecks of smeared blood.

He wasn't bleeding, it was Draco's; Skylar didn't realize that.

"I'm on my way to see him already." Adrian seethed out between clenched teeth, his jaw was already burning from the pressure.

"Ah, okay." Skylar nodded, not looking upset at the blatant dismissal, "I ah, I think I need to take Draco to the hospital wing."

"Leave him here," Adrian grumbled, and Skylar shook his head with a low breath.

"I can't do that. He's an arse but I'm not leaving him out in this weather."

Skylar got up before Adrian did, and left towards something. Adrian stayed sprawled on the grass, staring at the sky as Draco's blood began to flake across his skin.

I have his blood on my hands now.

Something about the thought made him want to laugh.

"Here," Skylar returned, gently lowering Adrian's bag to the ground. Thankfully, the ruckus hadn't woken Lutain. Adrian tugged on his bag, uncomfortable for how the strap pulled on his chest.

Adrian stumbled past Skylar, ignoring both the boy and the whimpering Draco on the ground as he hobbled towards Hagrid's hut, hoping to turn in his essay and head up to the hospital wing or find someone with a bruise salve.

He knocked twice on the wooden door, smiling widely at the large man when he opened the door.

Obviously, he didn't look alright with how Hagrid's expression fell.

"Adrian?" Hagrid asked in alarm, holding the door open and inviting the student inside, "What'r you doing down 'ere? Wha' 'appened ter ya?"

"I finished my essay early and I have arrangements for Friday so I wouldn't be able to visit." Adrian robotically responded, sliding past Hagrid's large hound to take a seat on the oversized chairs.

Hagrid nodded in understanding although was moving slowly and timid. Hagrid fumbled with the thin roll of parchment Adrian provided, pausing before setting it in a basket and stumbling towards the kitchen.

Adrian blinked in alarm when Hagrid handled over a grey tea towel, dampened with water.

"For yer…" Hagrid motioned to his face, and Adrian numbly swiped across his face. The towel came back with specs of red.

Hagrid had a frown on his face, something deep set and almost sad looking. He sighed, looking out the window as Adrian continued to scrub at his face, then his fists and arms.

"Who're fightin' out ther'?" Hagrid rumbled, reaching for a large mug to hold in his palms.

Adrian stilled and fumbled with his words, "N-nobody."

Hagrid gave a huff of a laugh, "Yer alway' pickin' fights now'er days?"

Adrian shook his head and didn't respond.

"How yer feel 'bout Moke?" Hagrid asked spontaneously, looking painfully eager to change the topic.

Adrian blinked, thinking about where he knew the magical creature. It was a shapeshifting reptile as far as he knew, able to alter its size at will. He didn't know about the color,

"Fascinating creatures," Adrian mumbled, clearing his throat and sniffing loudly. "They're difficult to house due to the size."

Hagrid deflated slightly, "Yer right, beautiful creatures though. I'd love ter 'ave one, one day."

Adrian nodded slightly, feeling oddly detached.

"Yer seem like one ter 'ave one." Hagrid added, a commendable effort to try and lift his spirits,

"'Ave lots 'er space at home?"

"Father would kill me if I brought home another magical creature." Adrian muttered, flinching in alarm as he realized what he just said. Hagrid didn't look like he took his words with any weight, and instead was looking at Adrian's bag where a sleepy black snake was beginning to poke his head out.

"Master?" Lutain asked sleepily, peering out and nosing his way out of the bag.

"Oh!" Hagrid enthused excitedly, "yer familiar! Heard 'bout him, beauty." Hagrid gushed, watching Lutain as he slid out halfway and looked around the table.

"Oh, the giant." Lutain flicked his tongue curiously, *"Why are we here."*

"Beautiful," Hagrid echoed, reaching out one thick sausage finger to gently trace along Lutain's back.

Lutain jolted but only watched curiously as Hagrid continued to rain praise on the vain serpent.

"How ye get 'em?" Hagrid asked curiously, "Exotic this one."

Adrian's head snapped up curiously, "You know what type he is? I've never found a name."

Hagrid looked excited, gentle as though Adrian was still something to be careful near, "Yes! Australian this one- Taipan, I think."

Adrian peered down at Lutain deep in thought, "Hear that? You're a Taipan, Lutain."

Lutain preened under the attention, coiling gracefully. Adrian smiled, something soft and wistful as he gently traced one finger across the snake's shiny scales.

"You smell like blood," Lutain informed Adrian cautiously.

Adrian's fingers stilled slightly.

"Yer know what else," Hagrid spoke, voice low and conspiring, "Yer know the first task?"

Adrian nodded shortly, tilting his head curiously.

"There be *dragons,"* Hagrid spoke, eyes wide with wonder.

"Dragons?" Adrian's eyes widened in surprise as well, his entire body tensing up curiously. Instantly the dread vanished, replaced by curiosity and wonder. "In the forest? For the first task? *Dragons?*"

"Aye," Hagrid grinned, "Ron Weasley's brother brought 'em over, Charlie, from Romania! Heard from Lupin tha' yer might wanna see 'em!"

Hagrid's smile fell slightly, replacing that was an honestly sincere expression, "I wasn' suppos' ter. But yer seem like yer havin' a rough day. Wanna see?"

Adrian smiled breathlessly, and honestly happy, "That would be brilliant."

Hagrid stumbled through the woods, talking on and off to Lutain who was cozily snuggled around the large man's shoulders. Hagrid seemed completely smitten, happily offering the exotic and 'rare'

snake anything he could think of, despite the fact he couldn't even understand what Lutain was saying.

"I like this," Lutain enthused from the man's shoulder, *"This is nice."*

Adrian smiled and wordlessly continued through the woods to the clearing where the dragons were being stored.

He heard them long before he saw them, great chaotic masses that roared and broke through silencing wards. Bright flashes of fire illuminated the dusk, nearly setting trees on ablaze and charring the earth and moss with glowing coals.

"Beautiful, aint they?" Hagrid let out a low whistle, patting Adrian firmly on his shoulder, "Jus' got 'ere yesterday! Come on!" He corralled, pushing the smaller boy closer to the cages.

"Hagrid!" A large scarred man shouted, giving a wave, "Sent by Dumbledore again, aye?"

"Not this time, Kakor!" Hagrid laughed, jerking one thumb over towards Adrian, "Showin' 'round my best student 'ere!"

The man's smile faltered, looking skeptical at Adrian. His eyes quickly glanced through an expression of pity, no doubt Adrian's scars looked horrifying with the dragon's fire.

"You sure, Hagrid? This no place for a uh, student."

Hagrid didn't look deterred, "No worry! Look 'ere at 'is famil'er!"

On cue, Lutain lifted his head up and peered at the dragon keeper, who inhaled sharply in awe. The snake was nearly invisible in the dark, his bright yellow stomach plates caught the light and shimmered as the fiery orange casted flickering designs over his back and length.

"My!" The man gasped in surprise and adoration, "What a beauty! Absolutely gorgeous boy, an elapid, aye?"

"Taipan!" Hagrid corrected eagerly, "Docile as a Kneezle!"

Adrian almost commented on how most students couldn't even control a Kneezle kitten.

The dragon keeper, Kakor looked approving, "Come along, mate! You'll fit right in, what's your name?"

"Adrian," he explained, reaching up with one arm for Lutain to uncoil and travel down, looping over his throat and neck happily, "Adrian Selwyn."

"Well, nice to meet you Adrian, and your familiar. Beautiful boy- Geomi back at the preserve has got a, uh," The man stumbled in thought for a second, "A uh, a occamy. Great big feather snake, golden eggs. Sucker for skrewts."

"I know them, I've never met one but I know them." Adrian explained, following the man as he took him on a round path around the furthest edge of the huge cages.

"We were going to bring in a few for the task, but they're already under threat," Kakor explained sympathetically, "Dragons were easier, ah, look here! Isn't she beauty? Smallest short snout we had."

The dragon inside grumbled low in its chest, sliding one membraned eye to peer at them from

behind the enchanted cage bars. It had a very short maw, rounded and angry like a hound's muzzle. It had an impressive horn breaching from above its nostrils and curving up over its skull like a rhinoceros.

"Such strange creatures," Lutain commented, peering at the wings with veiled confusion.

"And here!" Kakor enthused, pointing to the next cage, "Now *this* girl was a hassle to pack up."

It was a disturbingly warped dragon, face scrunched and oddly shaped like a drawing of a child. Its snout was long and flared at the end, scrunched like a seahorse. Its scales suggested something more aquatic, although its antennae were completely out of place.

"Catalonian Fireball," He grinned, patting Adrian's back twice, "The wild ball of dragons. They don't breathe fire, they *spit* it."

It made a strange gurgling purr, turning to peer at them with strangely luminescent eyes.

"And here!" The man continued, moving to the smallest cage of them all, "We were thinking about bringing in a Horntail, but she was a bit ill after a bad cow. Here we got a Peruvian Vipertooth, only dragon with venom." The man grinned, gesturing to a strange dragon that appeared like its scales had feathers.

It made an odd chuffing noise, dragging its legs out and to the side as it awkwardly shifted between slithering and walking with long clawed legs.

"Venom, like all noble creatures." Lutain sniffed happily.

The dragon quizzically tilted its head peering at Adrian directly, it made a strange noise once and nuzzled the bars.

"She's a real sweetheart," Kakor grinned, "likes her trees and perches though, more like a snake this one than a bird."

"Hello!" Lutain hissed happily towards the Vipertooth.

It chuffed and tilted its head, *"k-kello"*

Adrian jolted slightly, trying not to make a scene. The dragon chortled happily and repeated the noise over like a parrot, jumping at the bars happily.

"And here," Kakor continued, gesturing to the last dragon, "Is a Ukrainian Ironbelly! Just a baby of course, since they're the largest species ever found. But wicked thick hide, can't be cursed either."

The dragon rumbled lowly, looking more like a large black and grey boulder in the setting sun.

"Amazing, all of them," Adrian smiled, looking back at the Vipertooth which was still mimicking Lutain's words earlier, "How will the champions select them?"

"At random," Kakor shrugged, "Nothing assigned, they just need to protect an egg or something like that. Unlucky bunch they are, wouldn't want to annoy princess over here," He jerked his hand at the Vipertooth.

Adrian smiled at the beautiful dragons, dazzling in their own ways, "Am I permitted to return?"

Kakor smirked lopsidedly, "You got yourself a Taipan, dontcha? Reckon' these beasts are more afraid of you then you of them."

Imposter

Chapter Summary

> Where Luna knows things she shouldn't, Skylar is trying to keep the peace, and something is strange with Moody.

"Could you take me to see them?" Luna asked lightly, swinging her feet as she sat on the ledge near the covered bridge.

Adrian cocked one eyebrow, not looking at her as he pondered the lake far below.

"I think they're beautiful," Luna continued as if he had responded, "Just a bit misunderstood. Like Wakkamost."

"What's a Wakkamost?" Adrian asked, bemused, conjuring a small rock to throw from the bridge.

"Small orange creatures, they live in the cabbages and eat the mold." Luna informed him sagely, "People think they cause blights, but really they're trying to help."

Adrian had learned not to question the strange things Luna said, nor the strange seer like abilities she had displayed more than once.

"They aren't friendly, not like thestrals." Adrian warned quietly, "I don't think Hagrid broke the rules just for me to escort you to them later."

Luna huffed quietly, a disgruntled noise that was eerily similar to the scoffs Hedwig gave when he stopped her after her fourth treat. Luna paused, eying one strand of her hair which drifted between her eyes. She stuck out her bottom lip, exhaling quickly to puff the strand away gently.

"What's your Animagus form?" She asked abruptly, both hands raising to cup her chin and take the weight of her head. She turned, tilting her head slightly and glancing with her hazel eyes onto Adrian's scarred face.

"I-I beg your pardon?" Adrian blinked in surprise at the suddenly direct question. His tone of voice nearly squeaked, raising in pitch so quickly it was obvious he was taken aback.

"Animagus form, I thought you were trying to do that with the mandrake leaf under your tongue. Tricklibellies were all around you since the year started," She tilted her head sideways, "They like the smell of rosemary."

Adrian's mouth opened and closed wordlessly for a few seconds. After a pause, his entire expression slipped and fell flat, leaving her with something painfully blank, "So what if I was?"

Luna smiled, a large bemused expression overtaking her face, "I wondered what your form would be. I think you'd be a dashing otter."

Adrian gave a bark of laughter against his better judgement, cracking his facade, "An otter? Wherever would you get such an idea?"

Luna smiled knowingly, "No, perhaps you're right. Have you considered a badger?"

"I'm not a Hufflepuff."

"But you're so excellent with finding things out."

Adrian blinked quickly in lapse of anything else, "I don't see how that's relevant."

Luna giggled as if he had been the butt end of an inside joke. "Hufflepuff's are good at finding things."

"You should find a Hufflepuff then, hunt down your missing shoes." Adrian noted, pointing at her bare feet. Her toes wiggled on the cold stone for emphasis.

"Oh, it's not that cold anymore." She smiled softly, once more looking at him as if she knew all the answers to questions he hadn't asked yet. "they'll turn up eventually. My roommates think it's funny how my things go missing."

Adrian's teasing smile fell slightly. Luna didn't notice and instead hummed tunelessly and looked out over the lake.

"This is a pretty place," she mentioned casually, "I should make a necklace up here. Do you have any twine?"

"Your roommates treat you badly?" Adrian asked, his voice slightly pinched. Luna glanced at him from behind her hair, shaking her head slightly.

"You can't fix my problems, Adrian." She quietly murmured.

Adrian swallowed thickly, hands curling into tight fists, "What are their names?"

Luna giggled slightly, "I wonder how you're a Slytherin. You're so hotheaded you should be a Gryffindor,"

Adrian opened his mouth to argue, his words failed when he saw the look in Luna's eye, "Besides, I don't take help from those who can't fix their own problems.

Adrian scowled, "I don't *have* any-"

"I heard from a girl in Slytherin that you beat Draco Malfoy until he was coughing blood."

Adrian shook his head speechless. Luna twirled a strand of hair between her fingers, "I heard you also attacked her."

Adrian's head snapped up, "Why were you talking to Suz-"

"Anger makes you look ugly," Luna stiffened for a small second, twiddling a strand of her hair between her fingers. A draft of wind blew in through the hollow windows, tugging on Adrian's hair and sending a shiver through his spine. He twisted his wand, nearly shaking as he quietly cast a warming charm over his shoulders.

Without a thought, he cast another, encompassing Luna in a comfortable warmth.

"Thank you," she smiled softly, "Do you think that the Grindylows in the lake sleep when it freezes?"

Adrian appreciated it, the sudden random changes in topics to things he possibly knew.

"No, the lake doesn't freeze at the bottom where they live during the summer."

Luna nodded as if it made perfect sense, and then turned to look at him with a questioning look. She tilted her head and squinted, leaning forward to an unsettlingly close degree.

"What is it, do I have Horndrakers in my ears?" Adrian asked dryly, trying not to smile at the made-up creature.

She huffed, understanding his light jab but instead of that, she reached out with one finger to move aside a stray piece of his fringe.

"You have a scar," she mentioned quietly, "it's unusual. And it's cold."

Adrian rolled his eyes, "Merlin would be amazed at your observation. I am *covered* in scars."

"No," he argued sadly, "Those are warm and sting. This one is cold, empty. It makes me sad."

Adrian shrugged his shoulder and looked at her with a frown, "You say you're sad a lot around me."

"Maybe you make me sad."

"Why do you follow me around then?"

"You're the only one who would ever feed the Thestrals with me," she shrugged quietly, "You need a friend."

Adrian scoffed, "I already have a friend."

"No, you don't, not really." Luna sagely added, "but now you do."

Adrian pushed away from the stone wall, heading towards the extravagant front doors to the castle. Luna didn't make way to follow him, instead she started humming her single tune all over again, watching the sparkling water far below.

Adrian had made his way nearly through to the outer courtyards when he heard the commotion. Draco was standing there, panting and disheveled while for some reason pawing at his clothing. Draco gasped something strangled, flushing red in frustration or anger. He huffed, righting himself and visibly *glaring* at one tall adult in question- Professor Mad Eye Moody.

What had Adrian stumbled in on.

Draco spat something, inaudible over the distance. He turned as if to storm off, catching sight of Adrian.

Instantly his countenance changed, his hunched stance shifted to something stretched and arched as if prepared to leap. His hand was near his wand but now it grasped the wood tightly, as if facing Nagini on a hunt.

His skin had paled also, a slight tremor that must have been noticeable for even over the distance Adrian could see it.

Draco didn't comment, he didn't start his usual banter or curses thrown carefree around. Instead, he shoved past, not even acknowledging Adrian with his haste to get away.

Adrian didn't know how to feel, or how to acknowledge the twist in his gut.

The crowd turned to see what had made Draco storm off, and almost instantly dispelled with a few murmurs.

Skylar was there (when wasn't he?) and brightened on sight when he saw the Slytherin.

"Mate!" Skylar gasped, excitedly. He lurched towards Adrian, one hand landing on Adrian's shoulder and tugging him in an opposite direction eagerly, "Can I... Look, I need your help."

Adrian hunkered down and shouldered past, "No, I'm not in the-"

"Mr. Selwyn!" Professor Moody barked, shoving through the crowd with his lumbering walk and his sharp ended cane, "Come along!"

Moody was somehow in along with Skylar, shite that meant he had *no* hope of getting out of whatever mess Skylar made.

Adrian flinched and looked at Skylar who seemed apologetic. Skylar made haste to run after, Adrian following more resigned.

Moody led them through the hallways, clearing a wide berth with his ratty cloak and gnarled walking stick. Far too many times had students the misfortune of a single good whack from the wood, even this early in the year everyone knew to stay out of the path.

They eventually meandered their way to his office; Moody sighed in relief and dropped heavily on his chair with a grunt. Skylar walked in and took the opposite chair with the ease of having visited before.

That was peculiar, Skylar visiting Moody often. Obviously, it could be something to do with Dumbledore, Moody would be an excellent tutor for Skylar assuming they were somehow training him.

That only gave more questions, especially as to *why* Adrian was suddenly invited to these meetings.

"So!" Moody grunted, hoisting his prosthetic leg onto the nearest stool as if bearing weight pained him. Adrian wouldn't be surprised if it was all an act. "Potter here tells me you know a thing or two."

He...did. That didn't explain why he was here- was Moody wanting to know any information he had? His deals used to have a confidentiality exchange, there wasn't a way for Moody to ask about past transactions without possible harm to Adrian. Surely a teacher wouldn't endanger a student so carelessly.

Adrian shifted to stand solidly and coldly by the entryway to the office, not at all comfortable with the man. "I do." He stated coldly, trying to subtly ease his way to the exit passageway.

Moody grunted foully and waved his wand, locking the door in place. So much for subtly.

"Settle down there, Selwyn." Moody grunted with a scowl, "Stop glaring- makes your ugly mug look even worse."

Skylar winced and Adrian's face twitched.

"I've been making sure Potter here stays alive," Moody grimaced, pointing at Adrian straight off,

"I've been told you have ways to get information."

So that's what this was. Moody was acting independent of Dumbledore- that was odd. Adrian thought that Dumbledore would have confided in Moody, or the two would work closely together.

This was...Why was Skylar confiding in *Moody* for information and not asking his father or Sirius for advice?

"I don't do it for free." Adrian slowly spoke, wetting his lips quickly.

Moody slammed his fist on his desk office with a bang, Skylar jumped quickly.

Skylar wouldn't have jumped- he *shouldn't* have jumped; didn't Moody constantly reinforce to be vigilant?

"You think I'm going to pay you for this? This isn't my first show, Selwyn, I know a curse scar when I see one!" Moody practically spat.

"Professor…" Skylar lamely started to try and calm the man.

"No! You're lucky I don't try and get you out of this school, Albus owes me a few favors anyways. Word around here already gives him enough reason to kick you out, in my opinion straight to Azkaban!"

What? *What?*

He...He couldn't *do that.* There was- there was no-

"Professor!" Skylar shouted, jumping to his feet and standing between the two with a sharp frown, "I just need some *help."*

Adrian exhaled shakily, managing to scrounge up the effort for a monumental glare at the teacher. "What's wrong Potter," Adrian bit out sourly, rattled from such accusations, "Your bookworm gone rogue?"

Skylar looked sad, and not his usual pout. It was a genuine expression of sadness, like something terrible had happened.

How...out of character. The entire situation.

"Hermione and Ron aren't talking to me." Skylar confessed quietly, looking at his hands as they wrung together, "Look, I know the first task is Dragons but I don't know anything about the bloody lizards."

Ah, so if Ron Weasley wasn't talking to Skylar, then Skylar would assume he wouldn't be allowed to reach out to the relative who trained dragons. Which left Skylar going to the only magical creature expert he knew.

"And I do." Adrian summarized quietly.

Adrian crossed his arms smoothly, sending a single glare at Moody before he looked back at Skylar considering, "I *do* know a lot of things."

"Oh, for Merlin's sake…" Moody grumbled, grasping for his wand to no doubt charm or hex him with something petty.

"Look mate," Skylar jumped in between once again, "I just need some help. You're the best bloke I know, even if the Professor doesn't think that you're that useful."

Now that was insulting his reputation.

Adrian looked past Skylar and right at Moody, focusing on his natural eye. Adrian's lip curled as he stared at the auror, wishing he had Lutain on him.

Despite that, he didn't need a snake just to piss someone off.

Adrian's mouth twisted into a smirk, "Bite me, Professor."

Moody's grim expression shifted into something pleasantly pissed off, and without any stumble on his prosthetic he snatched up his wand and pressed the tip under Adrian's jaw, flush to his jugular.

"Listen here, *brat."* Moody growled lowly, "I have dealt with enough of your shite. I have heard *everything* from the rest of the staff about your performance. If you don't think you're not hanging by a *thread* to even stay here, then you're in for a rough year." Moody grinned viciously, fake eye lolling in his socket.

Adrian swallowed thickly, and without saying anything else leant *forward*, pressing his throat even further against the wand. Moody's real eye widened a micro fraction- surprise.

Adrian was used to bluffs; this in comparison was pitiful.

"Professor," Skylar choked out, sounding winding and borderline panicking, "I ah, I appreciate the effort but you *really don't* need to threaten Adrian."

Moody chuffed, his breath was foul. "Never hurts to be prepared, Mr. Potter."

Moody slowly dragged his wand back, yet never lowered it all the way.

Adrian could breathe again, and found himself *whirling* from how chaotic everything was. He just got threatened, by a *teacher.*

A teacher that he *knew* was a high-level wizard, capable of hundreds of spells Adrian had never even heard of.

A teacher…

A teacher that hadn't even *flinched* when displaying the unforgivable.

How?

"Adrian?" Skylar asked inquiring, still sounding pinched and worried.

Right, the dragons.

"There are four dragons. They're randomly assigned to a champion. There's a Swedish Short Snout, a Peruvian Vipertooth, a Catalonian Fireball, a Ukrainian Ironbelly."

Skylar blinked obliviously. Of course, it was too much to hope for that Skylar knew the species.

"The youngest is the Ironbelly, but is unaffected by spells. The Fireball spits fire, which is considerably more dangerous than breathing fire. The Short Snout can break stone by ramming, and the longest reach with its fire. The Vipertooth has venom and a speed advantage." Adrian

grudgingly added.

Moody blinked in slight surprise before grinning crookedly in satisfaction. What a complete flip from before.

"Well, I'll be damned, you were right, Potter." Moody gave a nod of appreciation, "Which one is slowest?"

"The Ironbelly," Adrian instantly responded, "Short Snout would try to follow you, the Fireball and Vipertooth won't even try."

Moody let out a wave of laughter, forcefully patting Skylar and nearly sending the boy sprawling, "There you go Potter!"

Skylar grimaced but had a thankful look in his eye, "Thanks mate, a real lifesaver you are."

Moody was...something was wrong.

Adrian sniffed, pausing and staring at Moody with a pause, "Of course. You know where I am."

Something buzzed in the back of Adrian's mind, the niggling thoughts of a terrible idea.

He hadn't ever tried something of this caliber, yet he did have blind faith in the formidable barriers and construction his father had built so long ago.

After all, how different was legilimency than Occlumency? He already *knew* his father had implanted the formidable defenses, logically shouldn't the same theory be applied for legilimency? Moody didn't have Occlumency barriers; Legilimency was *rare.*

He gathered the barriers, twisting the intangible strands and sharpening it like a mental spear. Adrian heard a sound like water filling his ears. He gathered it and *pushed…*

There was an unsettling pressure between Adrian's eyes. It was different than headaches or migraines he had experienced before, and instead felt almost tangible. A cold slimy texture, like he was pressing his hand through a bowl of gelatin. [2] He pressed, almost feeling a non-existential limb reach out as he pressed and *pressed…*

Moody flinched and grumbled suddenly, breaking eye contact and slapping Skylar on the back.

"Hurry on, Potter. I want a few words with Selwyn here."

Shite.

Skylar gave him another thankful smile before rushing off and through Moody's office doors, closing it softly behind him.

The door magically locked; it sounded very loud in the sudden silence.

Shite. Think.

Moody was an experienced dueler, but he didn't know about Adrian's affinity for controlled accidental magic. He could try and distract the man long enough to set the office ablaze. Unless...unless when he was antagonizing Draco earlier that day, he somehow *knew* Draco had been injured.

He had his wand, he could fight- but his dueling ability was severely limited while under

Hogwart's wards. Even Lutain wasn't nearby, his Animagus form wasn't even *physical* yet.

Adrian waited two seconds, nearly trembling where he stood, before looking at Moody once more.

Moody frowned, narrowing his one real eye and focusing his magical one directly on him.

"You're not wearing a glamour," Moody grumbled, crossing his arm with a scowl, "No student should know legilimency, *spy."*

Adrian's throat closed. He knew what Legilimency was- and he had *combated* Adrian's attempt.

"Huh?" Moody asked, rising to stand and peer down at Adrian with a curl of his mouth, "Who are you working for? Didn't know scum started at *your* age."

Adrian swallowed and knew making a movement for his wand wouldn't end well.

Damn, where *was* Lutain?

"You've got Occlumency as well," Moody sneered, his attempt must have been so small that Adrian didn't even feel it on his borders- Moody was a legilimens? No- he...he only had his magical eye. He *only had a magical eye.*

"Who are you?" Moody growled lowly, drawing and pointing his wand instantly towards Adrian's neck, "*Eh?"*

Something in Adrian's mind assured him that this time, Moody wouldn't miss.

This- Moody was a Legilimens, shouldn't his attempt have been slightly more... more powerful? Why wasn't the man taking him to Dumbledore, why didn't he try and interrogate him when Skylar was in the room?

Why was Moody working *only* with Skylar, and not using other family members? Why was Moody working independent of Dumbledore?

(*Moody wasn't supposed to be a legilimens.)*

"I don't know what you're talking about," Adrian fumbled to explain, raising his arms slowly to show he wasn't armed.

Moody sneered, "I don't believe that, Death Eater *spawn.* I've locked up enough of your kind to know them when I see them."

Something was strange about this situation, something was *wrong.*

Moody had displayed all three unforgivable curses in class and never flinched, never even grimaced. He had broken rules of Hogwarts in punishing students.

Moody didn't have legilimency. Adrian *knew* that- it was why he tortured captured dark wizards.

He couldn't have learnt it, he *couldn't* have that quickly.

Moody didn't flinch at Dark Magic.

"No," Adrian spoke, his voice low like a whisper, "No, *you're* the imposter."

Moody froze, that lapse in his demeanor was evidence that Adrian was right.

Adrian felt a breathless grin spread across his face, eyes wide in delight of finding out what he knew, "You are the one. You know who- you helped put Skylar's name in the Goblet, *you* did it."

Moody shoved him against the wall with one hand near his throat, pushing him forcefully against the stone.

"Listen here, *boy."* Moody sneered, nose wrinkling into a snarl, "You have *no* idea…"

"Do I know you?" Adrian laughed, a wheezing noise considering that an arm was pressing so forcefully against his trachea, "Did Bella ever talk about you?"

"*Bella?"* Moody's expression was masked, something shifting unnoticed behind his fake eye.

"Who do..."

Adrian gathered the whispering tendrils of his father, gathered the smoke as if a spear and with his mind he *pushed…*

And *oh,* oh what beautiful tangible power thrummed beneath his fingers and his eyes. Flashes and tunnels of light like Apparition through his *skull* and *pushing-*

Moody howled, stumbling backwards with both hands rising to dig into his head, just shy of his real eye.

Adrian breathed heavily, hands shaking and blinking incessantly, "You…"

"How," Moody groaned out, wincing and shaking his head like a dog, "Not, not even Albus…"

Because he would have been paranoid around Dumbledore, but not around a student. Not paranoid or cautious around a *child.*

"You're a follower," Adrian breathed brokenly, head still pulsing and beginning the pangs of a migraine, "You serve him."

Moody drew his wand with a snarl and Adrian shook his head and struggled to think of something to say, "I'm Bellatrix's child."

Moody paused with an unreadable expression on his face, "Nonsense, Lestrange doesn't have a child."

And that confirmed it. Dumbledore would have confided in his friend, only someone outside of the Order itself would not know.

"I..." If only he had Wormtail with him, then he could have an alibi or someone to back him up, "I serve him too. The Lord, I'm his spy."

Moody snarled and twisted his wrist to press the tip of his wand to the underside of Adrian's jaw. "I don't *serve anyone,* boy."

Adrian almost laughed, he grinned, a breathless look, and stared at Moody in the eye, "Nagini would love you."

Moody froze, stiffening before yanking his wand away in a single fluid movement. He stepped back, observing Adrian with an unreadable expression.

"Go," He grunted, pointing to the door with a silent snarl, "Get out of here, brat."

He knew Nagini. He *knew Nagini.*

Adrian nodded, leaving in a somewhat dazed state.

Until he resolved whatever had just happened, Lutain was to stay by his side no matter what.

He needed protection.

Nullify

Chapter Summary

> Where Skylar fights a dragon, Wormtail is useless, and things are certainly going to become much, much worse.

"Amato Animo Animato Animagus." Wormtail enunciated with his wand pressed over his heart, directly at himself.

Adrian pulled his own wand, pressing it to his heart, "Amato Animo Animato Animagus." he repeated, watching Wormtail's expression to make sure he pronounced it correctly.

Wormtail nodded twitchily, folding his fingers together anxiously, "Yes yes, and then the potion-the leaf?"

Adrian pointed his wand at his mouth, ending the long lasting sticking charm that adhered the mandrake leaf to his pallet. He pulled the leaf out, wincing as the hypersensitive skin touched air for the first time in a month. He handed the leaf carefully to Wormtail who pinched it and slid it into the pre-brewed Animagus potion. Once the leaf was added, the dark potion bubbled and shifted to a light red hue.

"Repeat the incantation every sunrise and sundown until a lightning storm starts. Then cast the spell and drink the potion." Wormtail informed him, sounding hesitant but out of not knowing what else to say, not fear.

Adrian peered at the man skeptic. "That's it?"

Wormtail nodded.

"That's disappointingly simple." Lutain sighed, casting a glance to the very amused Adalonda.

"Oh Cerastes, if such a transformation was wanted even I *could have assisted."* She teased, the milky yellow of her eyes nearly glowing in the dim lighting, *"You are welcome to use my chambers for your transformation."*

"Do you know when a lightning storm will start?" Adrian asked hopefully, causing the great Basilisk to unfortunately say no.

"I am curious why you desire a transformation of blood and bone," Adalonda continued, shifting her body so half remained in water and half out; she claimed it helped with shedding.

"What else is there?" Adrian asked quizzically. Adalonda blinked her large eyes slowly.

"Transformation of soul," Her tongue flickered through the air, long and swift in its movements, *"Of the skeletal beasts that reside in my forest."*

"Thestrals?" Adrian echoed in surprise, *"Thestrals are transformations of soul?"*

"And other beasts you don't dare seek out." Adalonda hissed, revealing her rows and rows of long

dangerous teeth, *"Those of the darker edges of magics where mortals dare not go. A pity."*

Adrian worried his lower lip, glancing at Wormtail who was nestled in the strange nest he had fashioned himself from scraps of discarded furniture throughout the chamber.

"Did my father ever try these?" Adrian asked, interested, causing Adalonda to hiss something of laughter.

"Your father ventured into soul magics beyond the breadth of Salazar. He ventured into the abyss beyond the scope of the deepest den."

"How do you know this?" Lutain asked, genuinely curious. Adalonda flicked her tongue out and twisted her head to rest on the stone of the floor.

"I assisted with his first tear. Magics beyond you."

Adrian flinched and Adalonda rumbled apologetically.

"No worries Master," Lutain hissed encouragingly, *"You can do magics too!"*

"But not like him, Lutian. Not even close." Adrian's nose wrinkled sourly, *"I can't do anything special."*

"You can speak the noble tongue," Adalonda offered, contributing to the list.

"Only through my father, if not for him I wouldn't be able to, or at least he told me that. Is there anything that only I can do? Do I have any skill that is actually useful to my father, besides parseltongue?"

Adalonda's eyes seemed to glow in the dark, *"You want magics that give you power?"*

Adrian nodded slowly, he did. He needed to be *useful.*

"Perhaps this man you spoke of will help, you should speak to him," Adalonda offered, revealing long teeth with her hisses, *"And if not, I shall feast on his blood."*

"You're so sweet," Adrian smiled softly, *"You're going to venture around the castle?"*

"I already hunt for this pathetic rat," Adalonda gestured to the quivering Wormtail in the corner, *"I can follow and scent the path of this man you speak. Or persuade him to my forest where I will feed on his bones."*

"Have you seen the dragons?" Lutain chimed in, *"Have you scented them?"*

"One offers conversation, the rest are brainless beasts." Adalonda scoffed, *"Wings make them arrogant. Haughty mongrels. "*

Adrian smiled at the giant serpent, having grown used to her company and wisdom. "*If I lure this man to the forest, how will you find us?"*

"You reek of magic," Adalonda simply hissed, flicking her tongue pointedly,

"Even if blinded I could smell your soul apart from a hundred humans."

The first task was a dramatic affair, set up outside the castle walls in a large arena warded against

all sorts of injury. Large trumpets and other musical instruments were set up as the bleachers began to fill with Hogwarts, Durmstrang, and Beauxbatons students.

A clear divide existed between Hogwarts students, those in favor of Cedric Diggory or those in favor of Skylar Potter. Some people wore gaudy badges and outfits to sponsor one or the other. Some people didn't care.

The bleachers weren't created like Quidditch stands, where houses were cleanly divided. Instead, all of Hogwarts mingled and united as one, leading to the unusual display of Hufflepuff students sitting with Gryffindor students. Ravenclaw students leaking into Slytherin and a few others mixed throughout.

"It is a wonderful day," Luna smiled, sliding into the seat next to Adrian with a small smile.

"Wha…" Theo choked, peering out from around Adrian to stare at the Ravenclaw in surprise, "Adrian, mate. You know her?"

"Hello! I'm Luna," the Ravenclaw waved, leaning even further to peer down the stands and row, "Oh, hello Pansy. Your hair looks nice today."

Pansy scowled, "Shut up, Looney."

"Alright," Luna smiled as if it didn't bother her, "Do you think anyone will be bit? That would be unfortunate."

Theo looked at Luna with a mixture of confusion and humor, "Yeah, I reckon that would be a shame."

What an understatement.

Adrian shook his head, purposefully not looking over at the guest students as he was certain more than one was staring at his face.

"Attention!" The moderator for the event shouted, standing on a slightly raised platform near the center of the arena, "I welcome you all to the first Triwizard Tournament!"

Cheers and applause echoed through the arena, students calling and screaming out respective champion names.

"The order has been preselected, as have the species each champion will challenge! Each challenger will be forced to get past their respective dragon and retrieve the golden egg! Points will be removed for injuries or damage taken! Points will be awarded for the fastest champion, and excellent use of wand work!"

"How wonderful," Luna smiled, playing with her butterbeer cork necklace.

"The first champion will be Viktor Krum! Against the Ukrainian Ironbelly!"

Blaise shook his head in pity, "The poor bastard."

A group of eight wizards moved into the arena, each working to levitate a large metal thrashing crate. Once passed through the wards, multiple chains were connected from a safe distance to assure the dragon would stay in the arena. They opened the box, releasing the roaring black and grey dragon. It plummeted a few feet, smacking into the rock outcropping and shattering a few of the smaller granite boulders.

It tilted its head back and roared orange fire.

The crowd cheered, and then Viktor Krum entered the arena, brandishing his wand with the determination and the thick stance of the dragon he was facing.

The dragon pulled back its lip in a snarl, its stocky build moving slowly like a gigantic alligator.

Viktor cast a spell, something strong and fast. It impacted the side of the dragon's hide, reflecting off. The dragon snarled angrily, flaring its wings as it prepared for fire. Had Viktor really not researched anything? It was practically basic information that Ironbellies had magic repellent scales.

"Oh..." Luna exhaled dreamily, "It has a sore tooth, that's unfortunate."

Theo spluttered, but caught on that addressing Luna's comments would likely make them stranger.

Viktor shouted something in another language, jumping and nearly falling off the rock outcropping.

The fight continued, Viktor using the surrounding areas as alarms and as traps for the dragon since spells were deflected from its pelt. Eventually he snatched the golden egg, stained with soot and rock dust.

Fleur was next, fighting the Catalonian Fireball. She performed slightly better than Viktor, utilizing her various spellwork on the dragon itself rather than any sort of physical ability or endurance. At one point, her robe caught flame from a glob of spat fire, smoldering tall flames from where it dripped over the rocks like lava.

Cedric was next, the least successful of all the champions so far as he challenged the Swedish Short Snout. Although his spellwork wasn't as advanced as Fleur, or his physical ability as impressive as Viktor, he still managed to obtain the egg without any serious harm.

Which left the Vipertooth for Potter.

"This one!" Lutain cheered happily, *"Adalonda speaks to this one!"*

Adrian liked this one, it was unpredictable and unique for a dragon.

The Vipertooth was unpacked, letting it flutter oddly to the rocks, grasping the stones to push itself forward on its belly over the ground, coiling over rocks and the shattered outcroppings. It reminded Adrian of a merfolk, using its front legs to drag itself around.

Skylar joined the fray, looking suitably nervous although his eyes instantly went low to the ground for the Vipertooth. He *had* done research on this dragon, good to see he took his words to heart.

"See!" The Vipertooth chirruped in barking hisses, twisting its head until it was nearly upside down as it lunged forward savagely, *"See! See, see, see!"*

Skylar leapt, avoiding the snapping maw and tumbling into the pit of the ravine.

"Where where where?" The dragon chattered, curling up and lifting like a cobra to search the area, nostrils flaring. One claw was wrapped protectively around the golden egg.

"It's very talkative," Luna commented with a smile.

"Can she speak the noble tongue?" Lutain asked curiously peering at Luna who seemed oblivious

of the question.

Of course she couldn't, it was chirping and clicking its maw like an excited crow.

"See!" The Vipertooth cheered excitedly, lunging forward in hot pursuit of Skylar who shrieked and took off at a run, using a series of repulsing charms to boost him *through* the air as if propelled.

It was rather ingenious, and something he clearly had practice doing. Perks of his mother being well versed with charms. The Vipertooth looked alarmed and surprised by the unanticipated movements, although it scrambled over the rock in chase with glee.

"Mine! Mine mine!"

Skylar snatched the golden egg, scrambling to outlast the angry dragon as he bolted towards the safe zone. The moment he passed the line, wizards descended and subdued the creature. The Vipertooth shrieked in fury, clicking its maw scratching with long dagger like claws.

"Well that was a shame," Draco sniffed sourly, "Potter didn't even get burned."

"But that spellwork was shoddy," Blaise added with a curt laugh, "Pathetic."

"Pathetic like Potter!" Pansy cackled, clinging to Draco's arm with more force than necessary.

It was almost a shame that the task was now over, it meant that the dragons would be leaving soon.

"They were pretty when we saw them," Luna thoughtfully stated, "although I'm sure the thestrals will be happy that they don't have to share the forest anymore."

"Thestrals? What nonsense is she on about, Selwyn?" Draco bit out, scowling and looking at Luna with a sneer, "What's wrong? Have too many imaginary creatures of yours melted your brain?"

Luna didn't seem insulted, she just tilted her head slightly and looked at Draco as if he wasn't there, "You seem worried, it's okay, I'm sure the Nargles will leave you alone soon."

Draco balked and spluttered, unable to form a reply to whatever the statement Luna gave truly was.

Adrian resisted laughing, instead lifting his hood to join the flow of students filing out of the stands.

If he managed to catch Professor Moody's eye, he didn't say anything about it.

The Slytherin common room door burst open with an intimidating bang that rang throughout the room. That in itself was impressive, since the door was made to actually *melt* into the wall. Slamming it open was almost impossible.

Students looked up and instantly drew silent as Professor Snape swept through the room slowly and pointedly.

He stood in the center of the room, eyes narrowing on all the gathered students before he located a select group of students on the far side of the room.

"Mr. Selwyn," He articulated in a low drawl, "come with me."

Oh. This wasn't good.

Adrian slowly closed his book, well aware of the silence of the room and how all eyes tracked his movements.

Theo shot him wide eyes and a questioning glance that assumed Adrian had done something wrong. In hindsight, Adrian didn't think he *had* done anything wrong, or what this was about.

"Any day now," Professor Snape snapped, apparently in a foul mood.

Adrian stood slowly, knowing he wouldn't have the time to fetch Lutain under such scrutiny. Hopefully Theo would return his book to the room.

Adrian walked behind Professor Snape without saying anything, knowing that in the tense atmosphere it would only make things worse.

They walked up and out of the dungeons, along staircases and past the outer courtyard before Adrian recognized where they were going. Professor Snape flung the doors to the Hospital Wing open with a flourish, not sparing a glance behind him to look at Adrian.

"Ah, thank you Severus." An old gentle voice advised, instantly setting the nerves beneath Adrian's skin on fire with anxiety.

Adrian hadn't ever one on one met with the Headmaster before, which seemed silly considering he was the head of Hogwarts. Adrian had always escaped attention, never quite falling into his interest.

Until now.

The man wore dark blue robes, thinking faintly in the shapes of the many constellations of the night sky. It was one of his less outrageous robes, especially considering the horrid selection he wore during Lockhart's employment.

A shifting step across from Adrian drew his attention to the rest of the ensemble. Professor McGonagall and Professor Sprout both stood with carefully blank expressions, Professor Flitwick alternated between wringing his hands excitedly and disappointingly.

All of the House Heads were staring at Adrian, trapping him near the bed of a twitching unconscious student with prominent and painful rashes across her body.

"Hello, Mr. Selwyn," Professor Dumbledore smiled gently, gazing towards the injured student sadly, "it seems that we have a minor problem."

Adrian's mind jumped rapidly, struggling to determine *why* he was here of all people. He didn't know this girl, obviously an upper year.

"You're right Albus," Professor Flitwick chirped, trying his best to look sternly at Adrian despite his excitement, "it's an old peddler's charm."

"As I thought," Albus nodded gravely.

The only peddler's charm Adrian knew was his own bargains, the way he essentially kept his ranking in Slytherin.

"Mr. Selwyn," The Deputy Headmistress started sternly with a pinched expression, "Although not expressly stated, such spell work is not permitted within these castle walls. Especially a borderline binding spell such as this! You're lucky that whatever you peddled was not of greater value, or your

classmate here may have been sent to St. Mungos!"

"What? I-" Adrian choked off, blinking rapidly as he surveyed the girl who was twitching still in obvious discomfort. Adrian didn't even *know* the girl, why was he the one brought up?

No, no he *did* know her. She had approached him near the start of the year asking for brandy or some sort of other alcohol. He had gotten it for her obviously, utilizing the hidden tunnels that spread from the Chamber to sneak out to Hogsmeade into one of the seedier sides of town to secure a bottle.

Bartering for alcohol, something which caught on Hogwarts property could result in expulsion was a rather serious barter. For her to break the barter would mean that she had attempted to rat him out, she had tried to break the deal between them.

"Mr. Selwyn has established a rather...*ambiguous* reputation." Professor Snape spoke slowly, eyes cold as his words drawled sourly, "I wonder how many students would start to...*slip up."*

Adrian felt his anxiety rise and a chilling sensation twist in his stomach and nausea rise.

"Now now, Albus." The Deputy Headmistress hushed under her voice, "You cannot expel a boy for not knowing!"

"But Minerva," Professor Spout hushed as well, looking almost ill in the lighting, "Mr. Selwyn likely has beguiled your own students!"

"Albus, the boy may not be exceptional," Professor Flitwick stumbled to explain, not noticing Adrian's sharp flinch at his words, "But this spellwork *is* clean! You simply cannot send him off after such work! Especially with how it wasn't a specific rule!"

"Perhaps you may not be aware, Fillius," Snape drawled sourly, wrinkling his nose slightly, "but Mr. Selwyn has posed himself a risk to my students and as such, I cannot permit him to…"

"Severus," Professor McGonagall snapped angrily, "Have you forgotten that Mr. Selwyn is of *your* own house!"

"Now, I'm sure Severus did not mean that," Albus calmly intruded, wrapping his aged hands around the bedpost of the injured girl, "and don't worry, Mr. Selwyn, I'm sure that this will be cleared up."

"Albus!" Professor McGonagall gasped shocked, pinching her expression angrily, "You cannot let this behaviour continue-"

"You misunderstand me, Minerva," the Headmaster soothed gently, "Mr. Selwyn, while your execution of the peddler charm was rather exceptional, I am afraid I must break the charm and those who have been affected."

Adrian's heart stilled and for a small second everything froze.

Then everything was in hyper-quality and the realization of how *bad* this situation was hit him.

"Of course," the Headmaster continued calmly, "We will require your wand, no no, we are not going to snap it, my boy." he chuckled fondly, trying to relax the quickly panicking student, "we need it only to void the charm and its effects."

Professor Flitwick nodded eagerly and held out his palm, staring at Adrian apologetically yet with

an expression which left no room for Adrian to refuse.

His hand shook against his will as he withdrew his wand slowly, pausing and rotating it to hand it over.

Flitwick grasped it and passed it to Albus who smiled gently and withdrew his own wand, grasping the strange ridges on his own between three fingers.

He tapped it, speaking an incantation under his breath. There was an uncomfortable tug, like a single hair yanked sharply from Adrian's scalp. He flinched, pausing before grasping the bedframe as again and *again* the sharp pricks erupted.

"I assume that you are experiencing the breaking of each of your bonds, Mr. Selwyn." the Headmaster apologized, handing over Adrian's wand carefully, "I suggest you refrain from any sort of future deals, I wouldn't like to repeat such an event."

Adrian bit his tongue as an especially harsh snap brought tears to his eyes.

""I will inform my house in the case that my students have made such bargains." The Hufflepuff Head of House admitted, looking concernedly at the others who mentioned that they would do the same.

Adrian flinched again as a particularly harsh snap tore through with the ferocity of Bellatrix tearing out a large patch of his hair.

"Mr. Selwyn, if it isn't so much to ask, I would like to speak with you privately." The Headmaster concluded, turning and offering his one arm in a sort of homely gesture.

Adrian didn't take it, instead he swallowed and silently followed after, hyper aware of how his shoes clicked overly loudly in the hallways. A few students saw them in the corridors, already whispering and gossiping although none of them looked surprised.

Adrian didn't have a good reputation, as well as his looks he was rather infamous in the school. Without his deals and all of the connections he had worked *years* to secure…

Oh god, he was *exposed.* He felt like he had been stripped of his wand and set before the Peruvian Vipertooth.

They stopped before a stone gargoyle which animated and leapt aside into the hallway when the headmaster said something inaudible to the rushing of Adrian's ears.

He was unprotected- and considering his relations with the other Slytherins this would end only poorly.

"Now, Mr. Selwyn," The Headmaster started, ascending the stairs slowly in the way an elder man could, "I must inquire if you have perhaps made arrangements with any of the students from the visiting schools."

Adrian opened his mouth to respond, jolting at how his voice didn't come when he tried to speak. He stumbled, choking uncomfortably as he stuttered out, "yes, a few."

Dumbledore hummed calmly, "Then I will inform the other headmaster and headmistress tomorrow, undoubtedly students will be alarmed."

They reached the top of the stairs, a large oak door creaked open and Adrian entered a large room

somewhat resembling the private quarters Remus had shown him before.

The room was decorated on all sides by books, some made from wood and leather while others on a locked cabinet looked unnerving. A velvet couch rested near a fireplace, a pot of floo powder nearby.

Ascending a small half staircase the walls transformed into dozens of slumbering portraits, now awake and peering down in curiosity and grim horror at Adrian's complexion.

"Now then, Mr. Selwyn," Dumbledore smiled, rising up the steps to settle in a large comfy looking chair behind his desk. Various magical trinkets moved and rattled on the wooden surface, dancing across the table top.

Adrian hesitantly took a seat in the other chair, finding the seat impossibly comfortable. Dumbledore tilted his head down, peering over his glasses to meet his eyes gently.

Adrian tilted his head away, breaking eye contact and glancing upwards simply to look elsewhere.

He jolted in surprise, eyes widening as he spotted a large, beautiful bird peering down curiously; roosting on a perch protruding high above the office floor, near the glass ceiling with a hatch to the outside.

"Ah yes, that is Fawkes." Dumbledore informed Adrian with a chuckle in his voice, "I am surprised he returned tonight."

"Phoenix's tend to stay out and match the sunsets," Adrian found himself speaking without realizing he was actually talking, "They fly through the sky and match the colours of the clouds."

"I see Remus was right with your affinity with magical creatures," Dumbledore chuckled slightly, peering up at Fawkes who tilted his head interested, "He speaks highly of you, you know."

Adrian did know that.

"You know, you remind me a lot of a student I once had," Dumbledore started wistfully, "He knew more about any magical creature, and treated them with respect and kindness as you do your familiar. Clumsy fellow he was, but had a warm heart."

The phoenix tilted its head curiously, eyes piercing and staring deep into Adrian's eyes. He felt like it could see right through him.

"I've heard some fascinating information from Remus about you." Dumbledore spoke, his voice decidedly softer and more careful.

"What did he say." Adrian asked, voice sharper and more accusatory than anything. He refused to look away from the phoenix.

Dumbledore leaned forward, resting his elbows on the wooden table between them, "Adrian, if you are in an abusive household I will do my best and take guardianship as my ability to do so as Headmaster of Hogwarts."

Adrian's temper flared and burned under his skin. "I'm sorry, *sir.* I didn't think that you were *interested."*

He could almost feel the disappointment rise from the elder man at how seething his response was.

"Adrian-"

Adrian shook his head surely, "No thank you, sir. I'm sure it would reflect badly on you to take guardianship of a *delinquent."*

Adrian tried not to smile at how sad the old man looked.

"Mr. Selwyn, I am sure you understand why your actions were unsafe for other students," Dumbledore spoke gently and hollowly, "And as such I apologize for the necessity. I understand that it was your way of coping-"

"What?" Adrian blurted, spinning in surprise to look at the Headmaster in shock, "Excuse me?"

Dumbledore blinked, rather taken aback. "I apologize, I thought Remus had spoken to you. It is our belief that your bargaining and deals were your attempts to protect yourself from others,"

Adrian seethed again, he didn't *need* protecting-

"It *also,"* Dumbledore continued as if he didn't notice Adrian's expression, "perhaps, is your way to guarantee that you remain useful to others, or perhaps a way to remain important."

"I *am* important!" Adrian hissed, leaping to his feet and feeling to draw his wand before he could think. Dumbledore smiled sadly, as if his thoughts were confirmed with the very outburst.

"I know," Dumbledore soothed, glancing briefly at Adrian's fist where his wand was shaking slightly in his grip, "You are, and Remus has begged me to remove you from your household to be placed in his care."

Adrian swallowed against the lump in his throat and struggled to think. The world was swirling, all of his plans were shaking and his *father* would be *so* ashamed…

"I don't need help." Adrian croaked, almost stunned when he felt water in his eyes, "I'm *fine."*

"You aren't," Dumbledore urged, "Let me help you, my boy."

"No, you've done *enough!"*

The headmaster's face faltered slightly as he thought rapidly, before his eyes saddened and settled on something below Adrian's eye, "*Oh*, oh Adrian."

Adrian couldn't deal with this ridiculous pity. The silence was broken by the ticking of the large clock behind the man's desk, rhythmically breaking the uncomfortable silence.

"I am so sorry, if your injuries were caused due to us." Dumbledore quietly apologized, "If your scars were-"

"Bellatrix got a lucky shot, that's all." Adrian duly responded, glancing back towards Fawkes who at this point turned to peer out of the window high above.

"Marvelous creatures, Phoenix-"

"Phoenix tears won't fix it, Professor." Adrian swallowed, trying to stop the shaking of his hands.

"If…" Dumbledore aged, suddenly gaining many years and looking *so tired* before his very eyes, "You have friends in us, Mr. Selwyn. We will always help those in need,"

Adrian paused before he nodded slowly, "Yes sir. Goodnight."

They weren't done, but Adrian couldn't stay in the room any longer.

He was very, very exposed.

Incapable

Chapter Summary

Where Dumbledore thinks, Adrian is cursed, and Crouch is cornered.

Albus Dumbledore sat at his desk, head in his hands. For the first time in years he felt completely at a loss.

He had been so *sure,* he had his faith in Skylar Potter and with all his careful work with the Order as well as Skylar's own education, he felt that they had a chance.

But the child...revealed something to him he hadn't ever considered before. Something horrifying that left him feeling as if wraiths were squeezing his heart from its place in his chest.

The child Adrian Selwyn was something which brought him much pain.

He had heard things about the boy, of course, although his numerous duties kept him from meeting him over the summer or when Remus had told him he took the boy on himself. He had heard and seen the child in passing, discussing with a few medi wizards and curse breakers the probability of healing the poor child of such disfigurements.

He hadn't ever met with Adrian Selwyn before, even when numerous teachers came forward with concerns for the child. Of course, rumors of illegal activity had circulated widely around the child but Albus had dismissed them simply as rumors. Now with the knowledge that somehow this child *was* able to obtain illegal goods for other students left him deeply concerned.

How was he getting the goods? Of course, a case of firewhiskey wouldn't be too difficult for a seventh year to smuggle into the castle, or the Weasley Twins knowing their knack at somehow managing outrageous feats. But a *fourth year?*

Albus immediately wondered if the child had an external supplier sending him parcels in the mail, although the wards would search and reject illegal objects even if sent to the Owlery. Adrian Selwyn *must* have discovered some way to sneak in and out of the castle grounds, or perhaps found a loophole in the wards themselves. That meant he had connections outside the castle with less reputable sources, perhaps even with Bellatrix who was rumored to be the child's mother.

He hadn't believed the stories, but after the encounter he had no doubt that the child *had* interacted with the witch. He couldn't possibly fathom Bellatrix being permitted to rear or even give birth to a child given her position- he couldn't imagine *Tom* permitting it.

He had never known Tom to let something important to him slip out from between his fingers; he would have kept a closer eye on the child if he truly was what he than that, if Tom had accepted the child to be raised, he would have found some form of use for the child. He wouldn't have permitted such harm to occur to the boy if he was as vital as he seemed to even live.

Unless... unless the horrific damage to the boy was on *purpose.*

"Oh Tom," Dumbledore sighed, rubbing his temple as once again he was overwhelmed by the horrors of his old student.

Adrian Selwyn had to be removed and relocated to a safer place immediately, before he could be disposed of like a pawn in Voldemort's savage path of damnation. The boy had to be rescued, or at the least, guarded. He couldn't allow this sort of… this *atrocity* to continue.

Yet he had never considered his old student to actively seek the tactic of using children, especially with the time and investment required to raise a child from birth.

Yet Adrian showed significant trauma and abuse both mentally and magically. No child should have such tight, *restrained*, control over accidental magic, even as impulsive and explosive as it was. Adrian Selwyn had experienced nothing of a normal childhood, which left Albus with an unsettling train of thought.

What if there were *more?* What if Tom had simply reared a large supply of children to pick and select the strongest or most charming for whatever his plans?

A disguised spy could slip into the castle and open the Chamber of Secrets, especially if his rival had long since raised it for such purpose. Of course, to open the Chamber of Secrets it had been rumored that only the heir of Slytherin could access it- was it a blood ward? Parseltongue? A different skill that Dumbledore didn't know of?

Albus stood and made his way towards his fireplace, grasping a small pinch of Floo Powder before he tossed it into the low flame. It burned green, flickering wildly as Dumbledore tucked his head into the embers and peered out at the Order Headquarters.

He knew his call would alert someone, and just as he expected, one of the youngest Order members skipped into the room curiously.

"Dumbledore!" she enthused excitedly, face lighting up and hair flashing an electric shade of blue in excitement, "Fancy seeing you here!"

"Hello, Nymphadora." He smiled politely, charmed by her constant enthusiasm, "Perhaps you could contact James or Sirius for me?"

"It's Tonks," she pouted, eyes alighting at the prospect of having a mission, "And hang tight Headmaster sir! I'll getcha them!" She skipped off excitedly, already shifting her eccentric hair to a startling shade of bubblegum pink.

Sure enough momentarily later Sirius Black skidded into the room, hair askew and worry in his face. "What is it, Albus? Something wrong?"

"No no, none of that." Albus assured with a grandfatherly smile, "I was wondering perhaps, if you could once more tell me the story of the stranger you encountered in the Forbidden Forest last year."

"The bloke who got Moony on the ice?" Sirius scowled, features darkening sharply at the memory, "Yeah, what you want to know?"

Adrian returned to the common room after his head of house had informed everyone of his broken spell.

He slipped inside quietly, trying to not draw attention to himself despite the glaring eyes.

"Looky here!" One student crowed out happily, "Little Selwyn isn't so protected anymore!"

Millicent watched him with amused eyes, her lip twitching upwards as others joined in the cheers.

One upper year grinned rudely. "What's wrong, *mudblood?* Not going to get us anymore potions?"

Adrian didn't respond, although felt his neck prickle as tensions continued to lift.

"You know," a different Slytherin mentioned, "You had me go snatch some leaves from Sprout last year. Got caught and Filch made me clean the whole fourth floor."

'Don't say anything…'

The Slytherin glared and pulled her wand quickly, throwing a jinx at him before he could cast a shield, "*There,* that's what you get *mudblood* for getting me in trouble!"

A few Slytherins whooped as Adrian stumbled to the ground, his left leg locked up in an uncomfortable jinx. He exhaled slowly through his nose, stumbling upwards undignified as he limped horridly towards the staircase.

"You're going to get in trouble," Daphne singsonged towards the other students with a dignified sniff, "Professor Snape won't like that."

"Oh please, that kid's been a pain in our arse since he's been here." A quidditch player Adrian didn't know the name of protested with an amused glint in his eye, "I bet he's made deals with the Gryff's about hexing *us."*

'I haven't…' Adrian mentally protested, but knew better than to talk.

"I bet those Weasley Twins hired him to get in here," Pansy sniffed, glaring at him with teeth showing.

"Bollocks! He brought a Gryff here two years ago!"

"You're right! I bet he was in line with that *mudblood!"*

Adrian knew that it was going to hurt, and hurt it did.

Draco watched impassively as Adrian was hit with another curse, belching large spotted slugs across the floor.

"Why is he not fighting back?" Millicent asked Draco, watching fascinated but not joining in on any of the casting.

"With the trouble he's likely in?" Theo sadly chimed in, watching with a small wince, "I bet if he threw a single charm Snape would have him kicked out."

Adrian stumbled downwards as his legs locked and he nearly collapsed on top of a particularly slimy slug, trying to skitter out of the way to the corner of the room.

Draco's jaw twitched as he watched the pitiful sight. He didn't particularly *like* Adrian, but the other boy hadn't ever gone out of his way to bother Draco.

Crabbe and Goyle chuckled as a bat bogey hex was thrown into the mixture, leaving Adrian in a small heap of embarrassment and hiccuping slugs.

"Go let his snake out," Draco muttered, trying not to flush embarrassed when Pansy gaped at him in shock. Theo skittered upwards without question, running towards the joined room.

Blaise shook his head quietly, knowing the fun would soon be over.

Sure enough, the moment the large black snake slithered into the room the older students started mumbling and staring at the creature with annoyed eyes. The snake hadn't ever actually *bit* anyone before, but never knowing if his familiar had a dangerous bite was incentive enough to stay away.

Draco always felt that the black snake always knew a bit too much, or seemed a bit too understanding of spoken words. Just another thing that didn't sit right with him, like how Blaise's mother seemed to always remarry every winter. With that, Draco knew that Selwyn had always felt strange, knowing a bit too much or having too many secret looks. Even on the floor, belching slugs, Draco never felt the sense of danger leave him. Selwyn could at any point, send all of them to the infirmery- Millicent on fire was testament to that. He wasn't now, because he had been dealt a poor hand and responding would only make it worse.

So Draco ignored him, and went back to his book.

Theo watched as Adrian seemed to pet his snake quietly, still hiccuping slimy invertebrates as he struggled into a more dignified position. With the slugs in his throat and the leg locking curse still in effect, he wouldn't be able to speak the incantation to remove it.

"Poor bloke," Theo muttered under his breath, fiddling with an empty inkwell simply for something to do. Pansy snorted in disdain but didn't say anything further. They all pretended to ignore as Selwyn dragged himself by his elbows across the floor towards the stairs where he struggled upwards one step at a time. Theo spotted a few of the students who had actually cast the spells sniggering at how pitiful the sight was. Thankfully the snake in question reared and hissed in the perfect portrayal of aggression and fury.

It took a few painfully slow minutes for Adrian to drag himself out of sight. Draco knew without a doubt, that his godfather wouldn't do anything about the attack anyways.

"What a shame," Daphne shook her head primly, "He should have known better than to play with fire."

Millicent snorted, delighted, "Oh he got burned alright."

Adrian's official punishment came from Hedwig who delivered the letter in her tight grip.

Written by the Headmaster himself, the note instructed that he would be serving his time with Professor Moody helping him with whatever tasks he needed.

Knowing how volatile and how impulsive the older man was, Adrian dreaded that nearly as much as he dreaded attending his classes.

When classes ended the next day and Lutain's black body was the only thing preventing Adrian from being attacked by more than just two angry students; Adrian made his way slowly toward Professor Moody's private office. The last time he had been there was before the First Task, when he had pressed and pushed too hard into Moody's mind (not Moody- if only he knew his *real* name*)* and been kicked out.

The teacher hadn't made any movement to tell anyone else of Adrian's claims, which meant that he was right in the fact the imposter served his father.

The office door swung open when Adrian knocked, and he let himself in. Lutain tightened slightly, flickering his tongue wildly in the new surroundings.

"And so," A deep gravelly voice grunted, rising from a chair where he had been grading scrolls of parchment, "the spy comes back."

Adrian's nose wrinkled ugly as he crossed his arms with a glare, "Careful what you say, imposter. I hear the portraits are charmed."

Moody gave a bark of laughter, his false eye rolling wildly in its socket. "Hah! You think Albus would listen to *you?* Oh you bloody moron, this entire school already wants you gone after your last stunt."

Adrian's jaw tightened and Lutain hunkered down slightly, remaining silent.

"Anyways, I thought about having you clean out the classroom where fifth years were learning blasting curses," Moody grinned, something manic and dark in his expression, "But then I decided we should go for a stroll in the forest. I heard since the Dragons left something's been a bit, ah," Moody's eyes practically *glittered,* "not *right."*

"The forest?" Lutain hissed, repeating it to make sure he had heard correctly.

"The forest?" Adrian asked, licking his lips nervously, "It's forbidden to students."

"Not with a teacher," Moody grinned, standing and taking a limping step forward with his prosthetic leg, "I'll make sure the werewolves don't getcha, *Selwyn."*

There wouldn't be any werewolves in the forest on a normal night.

They turned and walked out, Adrian lingering after as he cast a meaningful glance as Lutain. The smaller snake flickered his tongue unsure, *"You wish me to tell the noble one, Master?"*

Adrian nodded his head, not trusting the Professor to not hear his verbal words.

Lutain hesitated slightly longer before he started to uncoil, dropping down heavily onto the carpeted flooring and making his way towards a nearby ventilation pipe. Adrian assumed all pipes led to the Chamber, if you were a serpent that is.

The walked across the covered bridge, no students approaching since it was beginning to linger fairly late into the day.

They passed Hagrid's hut, ignoring the large man who briefly waved as they descended stone steps into the main path of the forest.

It felt to Adrian that he was swallowed up by the trees and plants only steps past the boundary. Sounds felt muffled and echoed, a birdsong ringing from every direction without revealing where it originated.

"Stay close," Moody grunted as he firmly stepped over a thick root, "The acromantulas don't like trespassers on their territory."

"I'm not afraid of acromantulas." Adrian retorted, watching the forest carefully.

Moody laughed, looking at him in amusement, "You should be! The centaurs at least let you know before they kill you!"

Despite the assurance that nothing in the forest would touch him, and Adalonda would be on her way, Adrian couldn't help but shiver against the sensation of fear.

An owl hooted loudly in the murky woods, mist swirling around their feet surreal. Adrian could have sworn he saw something like a thestral leap through the forest far away, dancing between ancient oaks.

"I think you better start talking, Mr. Selwyn," Moody gruffly spoke, turning on the spot with his prosthetic like a pivot. He drew his wand, holding it in a strange stance that undoubtedly must have come from years of practice.

Adrian stopped walking instantly, pausing and holding his arms up slightly to show he was unarmed. His exhale was visible in the light, clouding in front of him in a foggy puff.

"You wouldn't curse a student," Adrian swallowed nervously, eyes meeting Moody's narrowed real one. He'd been cursed enough as it already was.

"We're outside the wards," Moody gestured to the woods around him, "nothing an Imperio wouldn't fix."

So that was his game, a quick Unforgivable to assure that Adrian didn't slip up the entire year.

"That's hard spellwork to keep up," Adrian found himself talking, his mouth growing drier by the second, "You must have experience with that spell."

"I'm an *Auror,* Selwyn."

"No you aren't," Adrian blinked, not noticing his blurt until too late.

Moody barked a laugh, before his features twisted sourly once more, "Listen here, boy. I don't know who you work for, or how you know legilimency, but you better start talking *real fast…"*

Adrian spotted faint movement in the distance, and he dearly hoped it was who he thought it was.

"I learned that from a book, like everyone does." Adrian rapidly spoke, hands shaking where they were held up above his waistline, "Are you using Polyjuice? Where's the real Moody then?"

The imposter's left hand curled into a fist as he pointed his wand sharply at Adrian, "You're talking *nonsense-"*

"Master! Hello!" Lutain cheerfully alerted from where Adrian couldn't see him, although he certainly heard him from where Moody was standing.

Moody looked puzzled, glancing down and paling dramatically.

Lutain was curled up affectionately twice around the prosthetic leg, head nuzzling the real leg with adoring small boops, *"You smell horrible!"* Lutain cheerfully informed the imposter.

"You!" Moody snarled, looking at Adrian in fury, "Your blasted familiar! I ought to banish this ruddy worm before…"

"He'll bite you the second you try and curse me," Adrian informed him, feeling *much* calmer over the situation now that Lutain had Moody in a metaphorical headlock, "and Lutain's bite is deadly."

Moody scowled, pausing and slowly sheathing his wand on a holster on his forearm. Although put away, Adrian knew all too well how easy it was to draw again.

"Fine, I see you've got me pinned." Moody confessed calmly, looking strangely content with a dangerous creature wrapped around his leg, "What do you want, boy?"

"I…" Adrian floundered, suddenly unsure of the situation. He hadn't really planned out what to do this far.

"Oh Cerastes, what a mess you've made." Adalonda rumbled, voice low and deep as it vibrated over the ground like a dragon's grumble.

Moody tensed, peering into the fog with his magical eye to try and see what beast had made such a noise, "Selwyn, call this worm off. Something isn't right-"

"I know," Adrian cut him off, looking around as well, "It's a basilisk."

Moody froze and a split second later drew his wand and pointed it at Adrian. Lutain hissed loudly again, causing the man to freeze.

Moody's eyes rolled around, his complexion paling sickly.

"Selwyn, I don't know *what* you're playing-"

"Her name is Adalonda," Adrian continued quietly, rolling his shoulders from the tight state they had been in all day, "she's here as assurance and because you may be able to help."

Moody spluttered, gazed behind Adrian and *screamed.* His eye slid closed; his magical eye spun around randomly as if seizing.

Adrian turned and saw Adalonda slowly slide into the clearing, cracking twigs and uprooting small trees as she moved.

"He looks terrified," Adalonda tisked as if disappointed, *"You spoke that perhaps this man could help you?"*

"He knows dark magics." Lutain contributed to the conversation, *"If he doesn't, you could just eat him."*

Adalonda hummed contently, the high pitched whistling noise uprooted a nearby crow.

"You can open your eyes, she won't hurt you." Adrian offered, reaching out to rub his finger gently under her eye, feeling an uncomfortable ridge of flaking clear scales.

Moody slowly cranked his eye open, before it bulged and he gasped wordlessly like a fish.

"Oh yes," Adalonda crooned, *"That's been bothering me so. Could you tear it just…"* she sighed happily as Adrian tugged and gently removed the stuck eyecap from her last shed away from her clouded eyes.

"Merlin's beard." Moody swore quietly, trying to stop the rapid shaking of his hand.

"Who are you?" Adrian asked sharply, dropping the thin eyecap to the ground so he could address the man in front of him fully, "Don't lie, or she'll eat you. Alive if you're not cooperating."

Adalonda opened her mouth with a loud hiss, revealing the rows of sharp teeth like a python.

"I-" Moody licked his lips impulsively in a stressed habit, "My name's Barty Crouch."

Adrian stumbled and looked at him in confusion and amusement, "Adalonda, dinner."

"No!" Moody snapped, licking his lips twice in succession, "Barty Crouch Jr. I was in Azkaban, I

got *out."*

Adrian's eyebrows rose in surprise, "Did you escape with the raid for Bella?"

Crouch sniffed angrily, "No, before that. I was the first one to escape, first one who got *out."*

"Azkaban, that's the prison." Lutain informed Adalonda, who blinked slowly and exhaled from her wide nostrils.

"Why are you here?" Adrian asked, tilting his head curiously, "Why enter Potter in the tournament?"

Moody's nostrils flared in anger, showing just how much he resented the current situation, "The last task, it's a maze. The cup is a portkey, and I was going to spell it to take Potter *far away,* and finally finish my Lord's work."

"Your father doesn't know about this man, if he got out before the mad lady." Lutain offered helpfully, *"He doesn't know that he's back."*

Adrian's expression softened slightly, "Alright, Barty, ah, the Dark Lord has already risen again. He's already back, you don't need to kill Skylar."

Barty shifted Moody's expression into one of absolute perplexity, confused beyond words.

"But…" Barty trailed off confused, "But, he hasn't...he hasn't *called…"*

Adrian didn't know the workings of the dark mark, but he certainly could inform his father that someone called Barty Crouch Jr was alive and well and established quite a good place at Hogwarts.

"I don't know, I just thought you could help me with spells." Adrian offered simply, looking at his feet unsure.

Barty laughed, an edge of insanity- trademark of Bella- slipped into his tone, "Good work with *that.* You've *already* nestled yourself a nice spot of shite."

Adrian scowled, "I'm *trying."*

"Yeah, well your try is *shite,* kid."

Adalonda snuffed and scented the air with a tongue as long as a grown man's leg.

"How did you get a basilisk?" Barty asked, having thrown his guise entirely to the wind now that his name was known, "They're near impossible to hatch. And it's *huge."*

"Isn't she?" Lutain thrilled, looking positively overjoyed with another's recognition of Adalonda's size.

"Her name is Adalonda, and that's not important." Adrian clipped out, peering at Barty with a frown, "I need you to teach me spells."

Barty snorted, shifting the noise into an unsettling snicker as well as another lip lick and a head roll, "Sorry *brat,* you're not going to learn anything."

Adrian faltered slightly, blinking in alarm, "Is that a threat? Do you not-"

"No no," Barty rolled his eye, the magical one still rolling around crazily, "You're in my *class.* You don't have any apt, or skill. I bet you're still stuck under dark magic addiction."

Adrian didn't say anything but somehow his expression must have given him away because Barty looked positively gleeful (something which was disturbing on Moody's face).

"Oh kid, you're so disposable." Barty cackled, "what do you have going for you? So what you're *good* with *animals.* Like the Dark Lord can use *that."*

Adrian felt like he had been struck, like something punctured hard and was pressing further by the second.

"He speaks truth," Adalonda hissed, blinking slowly and looking considerate, *"Your father had higher skills when he woke me before."*

"Not true! Master has many skills!"

"The only thing that he can do that others cannot," Adalonda retorted, *"Is speak the noble tongue. And truly, is that a talent between the strong and the legend?"*

"But…" Adrian trailed off, his voice high pitch and sounding on the edge of something hoarse. Moisture welled and he *hated it*.

Adalonda lifted his head, leaving Barty to stumble back and hold his wand in shaking hands.

"See this?" Adalonda hummed contently, something wicked in her eyes, *"See how he trembles? Because I am not simply strong, I am a legend which will be told over and over."*

She turned, opening her mouth and displaying saliva and venom soaked teeth, as long as dinner plates, *"And do you, Cerastes, have anything to your name that make others cower? Or are you a hatchling child who dreams of prey far too large for his teeth."*

"That's not true," Adrian shook his head in denial, knowing his face was flushing ugly with his anger. His scars itched and his eyes were burning and his nose was filled with *disgusting* snot.

"Are you crying?" Barty asked, sounding like he was going to burst out laughing, "as if the Dark Lord would find *you* useful!"

"Master," Lutain unhooked from Barty's leg, slithering across the distance, *"Master that is not true,"*

"It is," Adrian swallowed, a lump the size of a walnut was lodged in his throat.

Barty heard it, and ignoring the grammar inaccuracies he assumed the denial (or confirmation in Lutain's case) was directed to his sentence.

"Kid," Barty grinned, unhinged madness suiting Moody's face, "you are the most nondescript, *replaceable* person in this whole castle. Everyone thinks you should be gone already, bollocks, even *Dumbledore* thinks you should be dropped!"

'I won't be left behind again,' Adrian thought, a whispering voice struck by tears and screaming, *'Don't ignore me. I'm useful.'*

"I'm useful." He repeated out loud, not aware of anything past how violently he was shaking.

"You really aren't." Adalonda commented blandly, *"You said a transformation of blood and bone,*

but even then you cannot."

"There hasn't been a lightning storm." Adrian shook his head trying to think of something, "I-Father said that I was useful."

"Sorry kid, but really, you're just another stupid brat who thinks that someone loves them." Barty snickered, grabbing a flask he always had hooked up to him and taking a swig.

Something pulsed and buzzed like a riptide in the air. The flask exploded and a dark brown foul smelling sludge splattered on the ground.

Adalonda recoiled, tilting her head in interest as Adrian visibly shook.

"Master, Master Nagini says you are!" Lutain tried to assure the boy, but he was far past the point of listening.

Adalonda and Barty had a point. He *was* useless.

He wasn't a good dueler, he had seen Skylar's duels and his impressive spell list and he wasn't anywhere near that level. He had no natural affinity for any class besides Care and as Adalonda said, that wasn't actually an important skill. He could speak to snakes, but truly was speaking parseltongue an ability that would save him?

He couldn't even do a physical transformation into an Animagus form. His father had expressed disdain for it before, he had thought the ability was useless.

Oh Merlin, they were right.

Adrian slumped to the ground, his knees sinking into the muddy soil of the forest. Lutain peered at him concerned, looking around desperately for a threat in lapse of anything else to do.

What had Adalonda said before, when he had first taken Wormtail down to the Chamber. She said that the Animagus transformation was one of blood and bone, and that his father had undergone a transformation of soul-

Adrian shook his head and started up at Barty who was still floundering in surprise over his famous flask exploding before his eyes.

Adrian was useful, he *was useful.*

He inhaled quickly, and exhaled it slowly and let it *flow.*

The ground in a half circle arching around Barty back towards Adrian, smoked.

Adrian felt himself sweating, he hadn't actively tried to push and control it beyond his desire to just make a single target *light.*

The smoke intensified and Adrian struggled to breathe, his eyes burned and *why* couldn't he just do *this right?*

The smoke lessened to a tiny puff.

Adrian felt the tears come and his anger rose and it wasn't *fair.*

Everything seemed to sharpen and Adrian felt like screaming and it wasn't *fair.*

I'm useful. I'm useful.

The ground lit and flared, not a roaring high flame but a decent sear that was not there a second before.

Barty glanced around in curiosity before rolling his eyes and peering down at Adrian with an insult on his tongue. Until he noticed Adrian wasn't holding his tongue, and the boy was gazing forward with clouded eyes and the barest threads of blood trailing out of his nostrils.

"What the...a partial Obscurus?" Barty frowned, tilting his head and looking perplexed, "No, no you're not."

Adrian sharply jerked his head, the fire dwindling down and leaving pungent grey smoke to waft through the mist, "I'm *useful."* He croaked sharply, looking every bit as traumatized and haunted as Barty's cellmates.

The sear lightened once more, flickering flames like a small campfire licking at leaves and twigs hungrily. The small thread of blood from Adrian's nostrils thickened, bleeding freely before the fire smoldered itself out.

Barty Crouch Jr smiled something sick, and nodded slowly, "You aren't, but I have an idea how to make you."

Adalonda's eyes seemed to glow in the dark. If she could, she would have smiled.

As I'm sure you all know, I write this story ahead of time and tend to review each chapter for publication. Due to this, I've drawn fanart for chapter 60 which without a doubt, is the most eventful chaotic chapter written.

As such, I want to post it as the picture doesn't specifically give away any spoilers but certainly doesn't explain any context. If you'd like to view the artwork (kinda a sneak peak of where the story is going),

*Click **here***

If you'd like to give me any sort of crazy theories, I'd love to hear them!

Anise

Chapter Summary

Where Luna has an unusual cloak, Daphne oversteps, and Herb bundles cure sadness.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to everyone who checked out the fanart!

Snow began to fall, blanketing the open courtyards and leaving frosted designs on all of the window panes.

Moody didn't act any different, nor did he approach Adrian since the eventful night.

Adrian didn't talk to anyone, nor did he have reason to. Since his deals were off and monitored carefully by the ever looming Snape, he didn't bother to talk to any other students. Already he had been attacked by one stubborn Hufflepuff, who had racked up over a dozen detentions from public hexes against Adrian.

Lutain came with him constantly, watching out but also sleeping around Adrian's throat for warmth. On occasion, the cold winter air hurt his familiar's lungs, and he was forced to remain in his magic cage where the humidity was just how he preferred.

Magical creatures were his comfort, at least *they* didn't mind that his scars made him look hideous or that he had become the lowest of the low. They remained ignorant of his position on the asinine Slytherin and Hogwarts hierarchy.

The Thestrals watched him, the black skeletal creatures stood out in the snow like something from a child book story. They walked loudly, crunching frost under their hooves as they rattled curiously towards him.

Hagrid appreciated the help, offering some of his old clothing and thick leather coats just for Adrian to hike around the cold snow in if it would help him bite back the chill.

Luna accompanied him often, well, she tended to show up in the strangest of places; waiting for him expectantly when he didn't notice. One day when he was dragging a rather impressive wooden sled loaded with carcasses towards the Thestral's nesting grounds; Adrian could have *sworn* he saw the fae looking girl sitting on one of the creatures' back.

He dragged the sled over the one root that always stuck out a bit too far, waving to the first curious creature which clicked its beak in excitement.

The other few padded over, crunching over frozen grass and other twigs. Adrian dragged the carcass off the sled, dumping it in the middle of the clearing. They could strip it bare and crack the bones.

"I wondered if you were going to come by." Luna smiled, appearing almost out of thin air by the largest thestral. Her hand was on its flank, stroking smooth patterns into its scarred hide.

"I wondered if you'd be following me again," Adrian snarked back, glaring slightly as one of the smaller thestrals got slightly nippy.

Luna smiled the dazed look she always had, patting the nearest beast affectionately, "Walk with me?"

Adrian wasn't going to say no.

They walked side by side, Luna wearing a thick cloak that looked to have random feathers stuck on with bits of gumpaste. Adrian looked odd with the thick coat he had borrowed from Hagrid, at least the two of them made a pair.

Luna stopped by Hagrid's hut, greeting the half giant as Adrian returned the blood stained coat and assured him that he would be by the day after the next. Luna skipped past and up the stone steps, making sure that Adrian was following somewhat close by.

"I tried to see the pegasus that came with the Beauxbatons," Luna started the conversation, "They wouldn't let me into the stables."

"I wonder why," Adrian dryly added, "Were you wearing that cloak? They may have thought you'd pluck them like a goose."

Luna playfully smacked his upper arm, peering up into the sky and spinning dizzily. She gave a small yelp as she lost balance, tumbling into a snowbank in surprise.

"Careful there," Adrian noted with a small sniff against the cold, "I hear gravity is a fickle thing."

Luna blinked wonderingly, not bothering to clamber out of the snow yet, "Do you think there are Hobskeins on the moon?"

"I doubt it," Adrian responded instantly, not even questioning her anymore.

Luna huffed a sigh, as if disappointed Adrian hadn't even entertained the thought. She reached out, grasping the offered arm as Adrian hoisted her out of the snow in a single movement.

They ascended the steps and under the stone archway, careful to not dislodge any of the large ice chunks. Luna paused and gave off a tone deaf bird song, waving to the Whomping Willow excitedly. The tree waved back.

"Are you going to go to the Yule Ball?" Luna asked curiously, tilting her head and jiggling her silver earrings.

"I doubt it," Adrian snorted with one hand tapping his scars for emphasis, "I look like I was ravaged by a werewolf."

Luna smiled faintly, "A ravishing werewolf?"

Adrian blinked and quietly sighed at how Luna had altered that. They crossed the covered bridge, pausing just before they entered the castle to stare down the fjord that split the castle from the forest. They tended to stay there, it was almost a common haunt of theirs.

"It's beautiful," Luna noted quietly, eyes appearing sad as she stared straight down, "do you think

there is green grass at the bottom?"

Adrian looked at her puzzled, "It's winter, Luna."

She smiled, "I know. You should ask me to the Yule Ball."

Adrian stumbled, nearly tripping as he jammed the ends of his fingertips against the stone of the window arches, "Luna, I am *not* going to the ball."

Luna hummed, sounding much more in tune than she did when she sang to the tree, "I know, you should be going. I think someone is looking for you."

Adrian ran one hand through his hair but said nothing more. Slipping through the warming ward was an instant relief, the icy chill vanished from his bones the further into the castle he walked.

His first destination was the dungeons where he was going to obtain Lutain from his box. After that, it was unlikely that he would be bothered, especially with the frenzy around the castle of students asking students to the ball.

Adrian was mostly safe unless he approached any girl, in which case the nearest boys would tease and dramatically call him out. The joys of being surrounded by children.

He descended the stairs, slipping through the corridors to where the door set.

Adrian slid inside and without glancing at the couches he started instantly towards the staircase where his room and Lutain waited.

"Selwyn," A composed smooth voice interrupted, causing Adrian to pause and grab his wand.

"Greengrass," Adrian nodded, turning and addressing the pureblood heir who closed her book calmly and stood to address him.

She had a silvery green scarf around her neck, her corn silk hair pinned back, although she didn't look any more stunning than normal.

She stepped forward and smiled thinly, holding one hand out showing him her nails. They were painted silver and artificial with small points.

"You're taking me to Yule." She spoke calmly, her eyes flickering to her hand where the pureblood custom was to kiss her knuckles.

Adrian felt anger, as was normal, "I must decline."

Daphne smiled, something sharp and predatory in her look, "You misunderstand, I've decided that you will take me to the Yule Ball. I'd like to show you off."

So *that's* what she wanted. She wanted to walk him around like an ensnared dog, publicly speaking how she had coerced him into some sort of deal when he himself had all of his yanked away.

If that was how she was going to play, he was going to avoid it all together.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Greengrass, but I've already asked another to the Yule Ball."

Her jaw fell ever so slightly, opening her mouth instead of keeping her jaw shut. "*Excuse me?"* She nearly laughed, eyebrows raising as she surveyed his face, "Don't be petty and resort to lying now, Selwyn."

That hurt slightly.

"I'm not," He bit back icily, "if you excuse me, my familiar is waiting."

She flushed and her calm expression faltered, "You do *not* walk away from me!" she hissed angrily. "You can *not* say no to me!"

Adrian wondered if it would be appropriate to punch her.

"Oh I'm sorry, *ma'am,"* He growled back with a terribly mocking tone, "Would you prefer I write it down and send an owl?"

Her nostrils flared and she looked ready to curse him. She paused, exhaled slowly, and then gave a pinched smile, "Then I look forward to you and your *date*."

He watched her return to the couch and open her book again. Her fingers around the cover were pale white.

Sometimes Luna knew too much for her own good.

One benefit to the school wide treatment of Adrian, was Theo's desire to not be in the same room with him. This left Adrian with plenty of time alone, sometimes the other boy never returned at night although Adrian didn't know where on earth the other slept.

The privacy allowed Adrian the time and opportunity to converse with his father through the horrid technique that was his tattoo. The sensation of the Nagini mockery sliding through his flesh never felt better, it always made him feel nauseous in the end.

He learned that his father genuinely was surprised to hear the name Barty Crouch Jr. The man having been sentenced to Azkaban during the first rising of the his father. According to his father (and a few sources), Barty Crouch Jr. had *died* in Azkaban, his body left behind in the cells and visibly removed for burial.

His father was fascinated in regards to how the man escaped and left behind a body, also how he managed to subdue and keep the *real* Alastor Moody enslaved and captured all the while not alerting Dumbledore.

His father assured him that the man *was* able to be trusted, especially if he had accomplished so much.

(Adrian noticed instantly that despite knowing a fair bit about Barty Crouch Jr., his father didn't actually *tell him* anything about future plans.)

Barty Crouch Jr. apparently, was an expert in use of disguise and manipulation of others. A skilled Occlumens (which spoke volumes of Adrian's unexplained Legilimency) but also a master of more unspoken magics. Although he wasn't a phenomenal dueler, his array of spells and curses were almost *entirely* exotic to the degree that reversing the effects were immensely difficult.

Adrian could use spells like that - it wasn't as if he could simply grab books and do with them what he wanted. Hogwarts tended to alert the headmaster of any dark magic or suspicious artifacts and books.

Daphne had become even more scathing, sending him even more vicious threats and comments. If he thought she had been ruthless before, well now she was absolutely *savage.* A glass flower edged

with a strong cutting curse.

Luna was wonderful and in that unexplained way, she had already informed him that she had secured a dress for the ball. Part of Adrian wondered if it would be something crafted entirely out of Spell-O tape; part of him was imagining how fabulous it would be if Daphne saw him reject *her* for a Spell-O tape dress.

Adrian secured a set of dress robes, or rather he had his set of dress robes shipped from his room to the castle. He mentally thanked the entire wardrobe hemmed carefully and fashioned from the finest materials just for his status. That, and his father liked indulging with expensive trinkets.

Large horses were rented from Hogsmeade to pull the normally horseless carriages from the various courtyards to the main hall for a more romantic path. The snow fell softly from the sky; no lightning although Adrian had been watching closely for the next lightning storm.

Adrian knew better than to invite Luna down to the depths of the dungeons to meet him, it would be much easier to meet her outside the Ravenclaw tower.

Adrian wondered slightly if he should cast a rudimentary glamour or try muggle makeup to try and disguise the scarring. In the end he decided against it, mostly because the reason the scars were there were to hide his true appearance.

Various pairs and small groups noticed him and gave him a wide berth. On his trek from up the stairs towards the higher towers, the only group who actively chatted with him ended up being the Weasley Twins; the two girls accompanying the twins didn't refrain from staring outright.

Girls that he never had noticed before swept past him with students on their arms. Other boys looked pleased, some nervous and awkward with the highly decorated girls on their arm. One pair of two girls in matching dresses practically skipped down the hallway, laughing excitedly and flaunting their dates happily.

Adrian walked past and suddenly felt painfully self-conscious with how horrid his own appearance likely was. He knew his dress robes were of higher quality than the majority of students, yet that didn't dispel all of his unease.

"Hello!" Luna chimed happily, appearing from the stone staircase that led to the Ravenclaw tower. She didn't even glance once towards where he knew the darkest of the purple disfigured his cheekbone, "You look nice."

Adrian interpreted it as permission to survey her own work. He saw the dress and couldn't stop the amused laugh that emerged as an ugly guffaw.

Luna seemed to smile even further, tucking one loose ringlet of her blonde hair behind her ear.

"Is that…" Adrian trailed off breathlessly, eyes almost sparkling at the horrid fashion statement Luna proudly flaunted, "Is that a *tiara?"*

"Do you like it?" Luna asked curiously, tilting her head where the large horned monstrosity stuck magically to her pinned hair, "I didn't like using them in Potions."

"So you stuck unicorn horns on your head?" Adrian couldn't help the smile, finding the hairpiece uncannily similar to a crown.

"I made it myself." she explained proudly, almost beaming under the lanterns decorating the hallway.

Adrian let himself observe her outfit even further, noticing the sheer fabric arranged in ornate frills that were overwhelming and garish in contrast to the glittering shawl and what looked like an antique necklace.

"Oh!" she gasped in horror, fumbling around in her pockets frantically. Adrian didn't know that dresses even *had* pockets.

"Ah hah!" She chirped happily, pulling out what looked like small twigs tied together with tiny ribbons.

"What is that?" Adrian blinked, watching in utter bafflement as Luna tied the small bundles to her nondescript silver earrings. Well, they *had* been nondescript.

"They're herb bundles." Luna blinked as if it was rather self explanatory, "Anise, catnip, some lavender. They're magical you know."

Adrian paused and laughed loudly, "Luna, you're a *witch,* not a muggle fraud."

She pouted and rolled her eyes, "Oh Adrian, just because you can't see it doesn't mean they don't work."

Adrian shook his head but offered his arm politely, "All right then, ma'am. Perhaps you could explain to me these so called magical properties of Professor Sprout's bedroom flowerpots."

Luna took his arm dainty, walking with a smile as other couples gaped at them either due to Luna's outrageous outfit or Adrian's own skin.

They descended out of the main traffic staircase, peering out into the overhang to join the waiting students who were in line for the carriages. The snow began to falter, raining down from the sky in small tufts illuminated by the various lanterns placed around the path outside.

"Catnip helps nervousness, anise helps ease the pain of curses and lavender helps depression and sadness." Luna repeated out loud as if an ancient apothecary.

Adrian hummed absentmindedly as if the information actually was true, "You should move to the country. Grow flowers and sell them to muggle post workers."

Luna giggled, muffling the sound with her hand. The herb bundles swayed and swung under her ears, brushing her jawline slightly.

"*Luna?"* A student gasped, hurrying over uncomfortably in clicking shoes, "Luna you look *amazing."* The girl gushed, observing Luna's outfit with genuine amusement.

"Thank you," Luna smiled, head lolling slightly as she didn't glance at the other girl's dress at all, "You look nice."

"Oh! Here," The girl peered into the line, waving to some student further up who dutifully slipped out of line and walked back confidently towards them, "This is my date! I don't think you two have met…" she trailed off unsure, gnawing on her bottom lip.

"Cedric." The man smiled, looking recognizable to the entire school as the selected Hogwarts Champion, "It's nice to meet you, Cho has told me all about you."

Luna nodded and shook his hand carefully, "It's nice to meet you - the Shortsnout you faced had a headache but you did okay."

Cedric blinked and looked at Cho, "Er…"

"This is Adrian." Luna tugged on Adrian's arm, pulling him a little more central to the group.

"Selwyn?" Cedric blinked rapidly in surprise, brows furrowing as he blurted out, "I thought they expelled you?"

Ouch. That hurt.

Cho's eyes widened and she whacked her date's arm, casting him a meaningful look, "I'm sorry, I uh, there's been rumors and…"

Her apology trailed off although she did seem sympathetic. Adrian noticed the way her eyes kept slipping, glancing at his face noticeably. Luna's arm tightened the smallest degree around his arm.

"Oh, pity the Thestrals aren't pulling the carriages this time," Luna sighed, looking out of the open doorway as a large ethereal white horse pulled around and students clambered into its carriage.

"Er, I thought the carriages are spelled?" Cedric murmured lowly to Cho who tried to keep her smile on her face, although it looked a bit more pained.

"Thestrals are big creatures," Luna offered, lifting her arms to try and explain how large a thestral really was, "They're black and have white eyes and wings, and they look scary but really they're just misunderstood."

Cedric gave an unsure smile and nodded along, tugging on his date's arm slightly.

They slipped back into the line and for the first time ever, Adrian realized that Luna was treated like he was.

"That's why you wore this dress." he realized, speaking out loud as the epiphany struck him. "So people would stare at you. Instead of staring at me."

"People always stare at me," Luna offered dismissively, "I'm different and people don't like that. I think it scares them, like thestrals do."

"I think you're more of a unicorn," Adrian added with a small teasing turn of his mouth. It didn't change his sad expression entirely.

He lifted his hand, over her head to trace the sparkling points of her crown, "Or maybe something with five horns. A Quincorn?"

"You're making that up," She smiled, looking horribly amused as she swatted his hand away from her crown, "I'm an Ogopogo obviously."

Adrian's metaphorical ears twitched, he certainly knew *that* creature. "I'm sorry, an Ogopogo has decidedly more flippers than you. You only have three that I can see."

Luna laughed, eyes sparkling as he played along with her bantering, "You forgot my gills. You can't see them because they're on the bottom of my feet."

"That's preposterous. I see the bottom of your feet all the time since you protest the use of shoes."

Luna flung her head back and laughed, the sound was carefree and gentle and for the first time in a very long time, Adrian realized he was smiling.

Fanart for Luna and Adrian at the Yule Ball!

Siren

Chapter Summary

Where Luna persuades, Snape isn't happy, and Crouch wins in the end.

The Yule Ball was an extravagant event set to go down in the history books. Professional photographers from various newspapers and gossip magazines arrived to take photos of the multiple Triwizard Contenders and the outfits they wore.

Luna almost teasingly led him masterfully around the outer rim of the occasion, sitting at decadent tables with finger foods and pastries. Almost clockwork, every third or fourth song Luna led him away to another empty table a fair distance away and plopped down amidst the discarded outer robes and plucked sugared plums and too-sweet juice.

"Oh, look," Luna laughed, pointing into the swirling madness with one hand. Adrian squinted and through the mess of black robes and glittering dresses, he spotted one greatly uncomfortable Draco Malfoy twirling around an absolutely *beaming* Pansy Parkinson.

"She looks happy," Adrian noted, trying not to audibly laugh at how disgusted and annoyed Draco looked with Pansy stepping on his feet, literally.

Luna smiled and pointed out a few other girls she knew and random facts about them. Adrian followed suit, pointing out other students he had known through his now void dealings.

"Luna!" Another voice cheered, familiar and sounding absolutely thrilled. Adrian peered over as someone broke from the swirl of dancing students to drag another towards them.

"Oh, hello Hermione." Luna smiled, observing the delicate pink of her satin dress, "That's a beautiful dress. It's like a radish, would you like me to make you some radish earrings?"

Hermione blinked but instead of looking baffled, she only laughed excitedly. Her cheeks were flushed and her chest heaved in the exertion of dancing, "Oh! No but thank you! I'm having a wonderful time, would you all like to get drinks?" She offered hopefully.

"Of course," Luna smiled, beckoning the two to sit down at the table with them.

Adrian spotted Hermione's date, eyes widening in surprise as he recognized the rivaling champion.

Krum looked uncomfortable as he looked at Luna, not quite sure what to make of the fair haired lady. He met Adrian's eyes, rolling his shoulders and offering his hand politely.

"Viktor Krum," He introduced gruffly, holding himself rigidly.

"Adrian Selwyn," Adrian introduced, shaking the offered hand and noticing the pure strength behind the grip of the bulkier man.

Krum's eyes widened in recognition, "Selwyn? The, ah…" The other man trailed off, trying to think of another word, "türgovets?"

Adrian blinked at the foreign sounding word, watching as Krum seemed slightly annoyed as he fumbled to think of the word. In the end, he withdrew his wand from the careful holster in his arm sleeve of his decorative cloak. He scribbled something in a Cyrillic alphabet, twisting and flicking his wand and letting the letters burn and rearrange themselves. Adrian peered at the magical translation, feeling his body chill at the word *'trader'* written in magical scripture.

"I am, or…" Adrian's nose wrinkled and his tongue felt thick, "I was."

Krum looked accepting and tapped one hand on his face, face stilling as he thought of the next phrase of words, "You try ah," his face twisted up in an expression of utmost concentration.

Adrian blinked and watched as the Bulgarian man scowled and pulled out his wand, arching Cyrillic symbols in the air which transformed into the English alphabet before their very eyes.

"It ah, it heals." Krum tried to explain, looking sincere behind the sharpness of his eyes and jawline, "Not all, but some."

Adrian was eternally thankful the two girls were entirely oblivious to the semi awkward exchange Adrian was enduring.

"Not this," Adrian shook his head politely, "It's a uh, a curse scar."

Krum's eyes flashed in understanding and the man's expression was that of sympathy. Without any further words, the seeker glanced around quickly and then boldly lifted his leg, nearly knocking the chair he placed it on off balance. He drew up the leg of his trousers, showing off a highly disfigured scar that stretched from his ankle around the back of his calf. It wasn't as noticeable as Adrian's own face and skin, mostly because the Bulgarian man had dark hair breaking up the outline of the silvery marks, but Adrian could see it for what it was.

"That's a melting curse," Adrian blinked, peering at it for a second longer before meeting Krum's face again, "The incantation...tabificis?"

Krum's face twisted in dry amusement, "Tabificus," He corrected, swiping the two glasses filled with punch Luna had provided. He tapped them with his wand, murmuring in thickly accented English before repeating it on Adrian's glass.

"To wounds and worse times," He toasted, holding his glass aloft as Adrian nimbly picked up his own glass. He smiled slightly in dry amusement, finding a kindred soul with the morbid humor. The glasses clinked together and they both swigged. Adrian wasn't the slightest bit surprised when the punch had a noticeable bite to it.

Krum snapped his fingers loudly, drawing Adrian's eye to him curiously. He set down his drink, much less in it now than before. He leant forward, bracing his forearms on the table as he lifted one wrist to point towards the younger boy.

"You ah, you can get me something?" Krum asked firmly, speaking in regards to Adrian's deals. Adrian felt his smile falter slightly as he shook his head, "No, no more deals."

Krum scoffed loudly and rolled his eyes in good nature, "No deals, I ah, I trade with you for a book."

A simple trade? That wouldn't need a spell or would be on Dumbledore's radar at all.

"What book?" Adrian asked, interested although he tried not to show it. Krum smiled, knowing he practically was already agreeing to the deal.

"Durmstrang, we ah have different courses." The bulgarian man spoke, his accent fluid over the name of his own school. The other words were slightly blocky, stiff and lazy in his mouth as if his tongue was numb.

Durmstrang also had a rather elaborate course in regards to dark magic theory and curses, whereas Beauxbatons had an extensive course track for healing magic and charm construction. Hogwarts tended to stick to the middle, giving each of the far paths only a brief overview but neither delving far into it or dismissing it completely.

"You'll give me your textbooks for something else?" Adrian asked curiously, tilting his eyes and scrutinizing the older man across from him, "what do you want?"

"Potion, ah, Bolopo," Krum shrugged.

Adrian blinked in surprise, and confusion over the request. A Bolopo potion? That potion was used as a gift or a toy for young children. The user would 'pop', so to speak, and emerge from bright pink smoke in the shape of an animal for a temporary while. Utterly useless since whoever drank it had no ability to control what animal it would be.

"A bolopo potion," Adrian deadpanned in immense confusion, "perfect if you *want* to become a shrew."

Krum gave him a shark like grin, "*Da,* perfect." He grinned, eyes glimmering with restrained knowledge.

Adrian wouldn't question it, especially since the potion was purchasable in nearly every common store. There was no way he could get in trouble for ordering something first years giggled about in broom closets.

"Why can't you order it?" Adrian asked skeptically, "It's not illegal."

Krum looked annoyed or as if he had been miffed, "Rules," He sniffed sourly, "No ah, no use of outside store."

That made sense, that way those in the Triwizard cup would only use spellwork that they had learned and not win based on money or resources others couldn't obtain either.

"Alright," Adrian agreed calmly, "for one of your textbooks."

Krum didn't seem concerned or outraged by Adrian's request. It was likely he would never use the book again after he had passed the year, "*Da,* I ah, I contact you from Her-mo-ninny." He looked adoringly at the girl who was still giggling and looking at something Luna was showing her from one of her silly dress pockets.

Krum did a second glance, peering at Luna in disbelief or shock. He blinked quickly, glancing back at Adrian before giving a loud guffaw, clapping the boy on his shoulder heavily.

"Blagodarya," He thanked, rising and giving a swift cuff to his own chest in a Bulgarian formal thanks. He then softened his face, walking over to his date and twirling a strand of her hair between his fingers adoringly.

"Adrian!" Hermione started, seeing that the two males were done talking, "You look wonderful!"

"Thank you," He smiled politely, although he distantly wondered what about him looked different since he hadn't put any effort into his outfit *at all.*

"Adrian, isn't it getting a bit stuffy?" Luna asked with a small sigh, trailing one fingernail across the table top sadly.

"I could use some fresh air," Hermione admitted, still looking flushed from the excitement of the day.

Luna leapt to her feet, pulling Adrian along gently as they headed towards the main doors. Adrian obliged, discussing small talk with Hermione and Krum as they mingled politely.

Adrian spotted Daphne Greengrass, looking even more stunning than usual. She stared stone faced as she was twirled around by Blaise, looking equally polished.

Daphne wasn't going to be happy, especially considering Luna was wearing an outfit on par with Lockhart levels of disturbing.

Although, in hindsight that may also have been intentional.

The snow was still falling outside so the four grabbed their outer cloaks which the House Elves hurried to store for them earlier. Hermione flushed as she wrapped herself in a thick fur lined cloak, looking very new and very expensive. Krum looked rather satisfied with himself.

A horse drawn carriage emerged, trailing upwards as the large white creature snorted steam into the air. Krum pulled on Hermione, helping her into the carriage as he glanced backwards at the two.

"You go ahead," Luna smiled into the snow, "We'll catch the next one."

Krum nodded and piled in, the contraption rocking under his weight. The horse skittered forward, large hooves trudging through the snow.

"You're upset." Luna observed, not even glancing in Adrian's direction.

"I'm not," Adrian defended calmly, actually feeling rather content for the first time without Lutain and in the strange isolation the night provided.

"You are," Luna confirmed, turning sideways to squint at him and then stare down at his feet, "I don't see any, but if you have some pumpkin I can check."

Adrian waved down another horse, absentmindedly keeping the conversation going, "Whatever do you need pumpkin for?"

Luna blinked her large silvery eyes, "To get rid of the Lysalanders. They like pumpkin, and let go of you to eat it."

The carriage rolled up and Adrian opened the door to help the girl in. She clambered inside, smiling faintly at him as he secured the door and the wheels began to roll.

"Alright, so what's a Lysalander?" Adrian asked teasingly, ready to hear the long story of this new invisible creature.

"Nasty little things," Luna tutted, frowning and crossing her arms sourly, "They bite onto your ankles and their venom makes you think bad thoughts."

Adrian's eyebrows rose, "Is that why you think i'm upset?"

"Oh no, you've always had Lysalanders." Luna admitted sadly, "That's why I have these herb

bundles. They don't bite so hard with sage."

She reached up and unhooked the small herb bundles from her earrings. She untied the one ribbon, looping it around the other bundle to create a miniature bouquet. The carriage continued on, bouncing slightly as they approached the castle.

Adrian didn't quite know how to answer that.

"You're upset because there's Dinglopers too, they whistle in your ears when important things are happening."

"Right," Adrian blinked, feeling the low whistle and buzz rising in his head, pounding as a small chill ran down his spine, "So apparently my ankles are being attacked and there's things in my ears?"

"Oh no, you're always infested." Luna corrected, "Rather badly I'd say. You should find a pumpkin. The Dinglopers come and go, maybe you're an important person?"

The carriage jolted to a stop. Luna ignored Adrian's dumbfounded expression and leap to her feet, placing a quick friendly kiss on his cheek as she slipped down the steps out towards her tower. She paused part way, snow sprinkling from above to brush against her neck and shoulders. She must have been cold.

She turned back, looking at the carriage and Adrian who was still seated inside. She must have seen something, or puzzled through a thought that captivated her attention for a few seconds.

"Come with me," She invited politely, offering one arm as if *she* were the gentleman and he was the swooning maiden. How very *Luna.*

He almost declined her offer, he almost stayed inside the little carriage pulled by the elegant rented horse. Almost.

The snow was silent under their shoes, muffling the whispers of where they were going. Luna didn't seem worried or alarmed, especially with the connotations with her actions. Nobody was around to see them, Adrian found he didn't care much anyways.

Luna took his hand, her own was much smaller and fragile in his grip. She tugged him along, deceptively strong. She had a smile, even as they deviated away from the main pathways and soon were treading along the long carpets that lined the single classrooms.

She picked one at random, looking impishly delighted that nobody was inside. It would be strange to find students inside it considering the ball was still ongoing- unless they were unfortunate enough to stumble on a pair of snogging students.

"Perfect," Luna beamed, walking past the forest of empty desks before she spun, throwing her arms out. She twirled, her dress lifting a few inches as air buffeted under the clothing.

"I think I had a class in here before," Adrian commented, leaning against one of the wooden desks, "It seems familiar."

Luna nodded, pointing towards the alcoves carved into the stone of the walls, "I think it was Professor Lockhart. He kept pixies over there."

Adrian grimace instinctively at the memory of the man, Luna laughed at him.

"Not too fond of him?" She inquired playfully, "I thought he had wondrous hair."

Luna had left it as bait, she laughed even harder at the disgusted expression Adrian unconsciously adopted.

"I like empty classrooms." Luna noted pleasantly, "They're so different when nobody is in them, but they aren't lonely."

Adrian gave a one shouldered shrug, pulling his wand out to conjure a light to see better, "I don't think much of them. They're strange when nothing's in them."

Luna ran her hand across the wooden desk, sanded flat and just as regular as every other classroom, "I used to do homework in empty classrooms. I like the top of the Astronomy tower much more."

Adrian looked at her in surprise, "I gathered you'd work in the library."

Luna teasingly rolled her eyes, "You'd know if you actually *did* your assignments."

Adrian scoffed and twisted his wand, the spelled ball of light rolled across the far wall, following his directions.

"That's impressive." Luna piped up, kicking her feet back and forth as she plopped herself next to him, "I don't know very many people who can make it corporeal."

Adrian blinked in surprise, "It's...really not that hard."

Luna fiddled around, pulling out her wand. Adrian resisted the urge to cringe at the poor posture she held it with, fingers loose and wrist entirely slack.

"Don't hold yours like that." He blurted, feeling terribly uncomfortable right after saying it.

Luna peered at him owlishly, glancing at the firm grip on his wand and then back at her delicate grasp.

She sloppily tried to mimic him, tensing her wrist and clutching her wand more like a dagger. She had her tongue peeking out from between her teeth, eyebrows scrunched in concentration.

"No," Adrian sighed, reaching out to adjust her hand, "Tense your wrist, don't hold it like a broom."

Luna followed his directions, shifting and trying over and over until it was something Adrian approved of. Bellatrix would have had a fit.

With a gentle movement, Luna whispered a single spell and from her wand two birds fluttered out. They flew quickly, quietly singing as they landed on the overhead rafters.

Adrian watched the two with a slightly amused expression, casting the same spell. A dozen birds erupted, each larger and much more lively than Luna's.

She looked at him with a pout, crossing her arms, "Not fair."

"Not my fault you just learned that spell." Adrian retorted. Her expression faltered, looking genuine and open as she informed him that it was one of the first spells she learned.

"Oh." He stated, blinking rapidly in confusion.

They watched the birds, fluttering above freely in the rafters. Luna's birds faded, vanishing in such

a short amount of time that they existed and suddenly, they didn't.

"Do you know half of the school is afraid of you?" Luna asked him, her voice adopting the slightly melancholic tone that signaled to Adrian that she was being serious.

His mouth felt dry, "It wouldn't surprise me."

Luna leant slightly, leaning over the gap until her shoulder's bumped his upper arm. She didn't remove herself, instead she tilted her head back to watch the birds above. Her hair tickled Adrian's neck.

"It's not because of how you look." Luna explained, as if it needed further explanation, "It's because of what you've done."

"I'm not sure how to tell you this, but that literally didn't help at all." Adrian shot back, bantering with dry amusement.

She gave a low hum, pointing her wand upwards and spelling something new; bright bubbles drifted upwards, each as large as a grapefruit.

"It's because of the rumors, and your classes. Most of the rumors are true, though."

Adrian huffed a sour breath, "If this is about Millicent-"

"You know, everyone in the school went to you if they needed something, even if it did cost them." Luna sighed wistfully, "Everyone knew that you could find out things they couldn't. Maybe you didn't know it *then*, but that's what it was. *Adrian Selwyn, he knows how to curse you in four different ways, and how to heal you in five."*

Her tone adopted a different sound, she lowered the pitch as if mimicking someone. It was rather comedic, if not for the content.

Adrian's chest felt tight, "Yeah well, you know how that business went up in flames."

Luna gave a small giggle, knocking her shoulder against his in good humor, "But you did that. I don't think anyone in Hogwarts' history made a bartering system for students. That's impressive."

Adrian shrugged, it didn't feel impressive.

"There's other things too," Luna continued pleasantly, "Nobody wants to cross you, or at least they didn't want to."

Adrian gave a snort, laughter bubbling up from deep inside, "Luna all of *Slytherin* wants me-"

"Everyone waited until you were in trouble. Until the teachers were looking at you, because they think that you couldn't fight back." Luna looked at her wand, twisting it in the air to leave a shimmering silver trail in the air: pointless magic for the sake of magic.

Adrian shifted, a deep frown marred his face, "They're too spineless to just-"

"That's not it." Luna interrupted sharply, "Everyone *knows* that if you attacked them, they'd lose. So they waited until you couldn't and they tried to scare you enough that you wouldn't bother them again."

That was...a strange way to think about it.

"Daphne Greengrass wanted you to take her to the Ball, because it's a symbol really. That you're one of them, or that you found a place. You're nobody again."

Adrian flinched, and Luna looked at him with an apology in her eyes, "I don't mean that. They just want you to go away."

Adrian shook his head and hopped off the desk, walking away to peer out of the glass paned window across the room, "Luna you couldn't *possibly* understand what those-"

"The Quibbler used to be a political magazine. We still run articles." She cut him off sharply, "Nobody bothers to read them, but we're really quite observant."

Adrian reached out and brushed his fingertips against the glass, the snow hadn't let up.

"You're like a wolf, and right now you're all chained up." Luna's voice was gentle, "and everyone wants to walk you around like a dog. Maybe they think, that you'll think you're a dog too."

Adrian sighed through his nose, "When did you get all wise? Here I was expecting you to go off about merfolk or humdingers and you pick *wolves*?"

Luna smiled bashfully, looking down at her dress, "I wanted a good analogy?"

Adrian *laughed*, and shook his head fondly. "Alright, O' wise seer. In your analogy I assume I just brushed off Greengrass in the most brutal way possible?"

Luna smiled, "You were very rude. I think that you won't have problems anymore."

Adrian's eyebrows shot up, he tilted his head in surprise, 'I won't? Why is that?"

Luna swung her feet back and forth again, "Well, you're scary, and you just shoved everyone off."

"I still don't see how I'm *scary."*

Luna hopped down, the conjured lumos slowly faded. The room was bathed in grey light, filtered from the snow outside and moonlight.

"Lumos," Luna whispered, the tip of her wand aglow. Her face was bathed with pale blue light.

Adrian pointed his wand and cast the same, sending the spell to float above their heads.

"People aren't afraid of you because of Bellatrix Lestrange, they were afraid of you long before that." Luna conceded, although it didn't seem like she resisted telling him for long, "I heard that you don't struggle with spells."

Adrian blinked quickly twice before he slowly replied, "No, but that's because I practice."

Luna smiled enchantingly, "Adrian you're *good* at spells."

"I'm really not," he automatically blurted.

Luna's eyes searched his, flickering from one back to the other, "Why are you arguing? Why do you think you're so...mediocre?"

"Because I am!" Adrian blurted, face feeling warm as he flushed against his will.

Luna's spell faded out. She whispered it once more, squinting into his face as if looking for

something in particular.

"I don't think you are," She confided, "I think you're brilliant."

Adrian turned away, breaking away from her and moved back towards the window. He could see her in the reflection, a ghostly glow bathed in blue.

"I wondered for a while why you were in Slytherin," she raised her voice slightly over the distance. She lifted herself onto the tips of her shoes, swaying as if trying to see above or around an obstacle in her way, "You're very impulsive and blunt, like a Hippogriff."

Adrian pointedly didn't turn around. He couldn't see anything outside in the dark, but he couldn't look at her.

"Slytherin students are supposed to be ambitious and cunning. I wondered why you didn't seem that way at all. It took me a while, but I think you're one of the most ambitious people I know."

Adrian didn't look at her.

"Whenever anyone gave you a deal, you accepted no matter how difficult it was." Luna almost *praised,* "I heard rumors that a few of them were rather tricky. I don't think you ever turned anyone away; and I don't think you ever failed doing one."

Adrian's jaw locked and his hands tensed and rolled into a fist. He wouldn't attack Luna- he *couldn't,* but he felt aggressive enough to punch a wall.

Luna was close, he nearly startled when her hand brushed the back of his arm. If not for the reflection in the window, he wouldn't have known she had moved.

"You don't really try on your classwork, or your spellwork. But you're so *good* at it, like you'd been practicing all your life. Like you've always had a single plan."

Luna stepped around, squeezing herself between the chilly glass and Adrian's front. Her dress crumpled awkwardly, pinched and lying askewn in the tiny gap. Her hands lifted to gently trace along his jawline, reverently tracing the scars across his cheekbones.

"What are you trying to succeed at? Who are you trying to satisfy?"

Her eyes were wide, glowing like Forget-Me-Nots.

"It doesn't matter." Adrian muttered lowly, barely more than a whisper. She frowned, the expression looked wrong with how beautiful her hair and makeup was.

"It does," Luna looked so unsure but so *concerned,* "You're *already* so good- why are you throwing what you have aside to...to *impress* someone? What are you trying to *do?"*

Adrian's throat moved three times as he nervously swallowed, "I...I'm not good enough n-"

"I'm afraid you're going to do something *stupid* for the approval of someone that doesn't matter." She snapped back, her nostrils twitching slightly as her expression hardened like ice, "If you just *tried* you could be best in your year!"

"Do you think that I could beat Krum in a duel." Adrian snapped, his eyes acidic as his voice dropped like venom, "Do you think I could beat *Skylar?"*

Luna lowered her hands, removing them from where they had cupped Adrian's face. The lumos

spell dwindled, fading and leaving them in the dark.

"Do you think you have to?" Luna asked quietly.

"Yes." Adrian answered simply.

She inhaled raggedly, a whispering noise that sounded painful. Her nose whistled slightly as she exhaled quickly.

"I..I *think,"* Luna began, "that you're chasing a dream. I'm afraid that you're risking everything and throwing your own safety away to...to reach some *goal,"* she breathed heavily, almost trembling, "and I don't think you'll realize what you've done until it's too late."

Adrian took a step back, quiet.

Luna lit her wand, her expression was blank yet still captivating, "You're being stupid."

What.

"What." Adrian dumbly echoed.

Luna looked like a *queen,* her demeanor had shifted to something calm yet privately seething. She looked like everything Daphne Greengrass tried to exude every day.

"You're being an *idiot,* Adrian Selwyn." she was practically seething, although her voice never achieved the level that inspired terror.

Adrian scowled back, fully aware that his face would be much more frightning than hers, "Rude thing to say, Luna."

She huffed, crossing her arms as she looked pointedly *not* happy, "This was supposed to be a *fun* night."

"Well it's not *my fault* you brought this up."

"Because you don't realize you're a good wizard!"

"I'm not!" Adrian snapped back, feeling the back of his neck prickle. Why didn't she *get it?*

Luna looked firm, "Adrian Selwyn. You're judging power on spellwork and thats shite!"

Luna never swore, she scowled when she noted his gobsmacked expression.

"I heard that Professor Moody talked to you wanting help for Skylar Potter. Do you realize he asked *nobody else?"*

That's different, Adrian wanted to protest. *He isn't Moody.*

But...at that time, Moody *didn't* know. He legitimately actually wanted Adrian for something.

"Do you know that Hagrid thinks you're the best Care student he's ever had at Hogwarts?" Luna looked furious as she continued with her rant, "Do you know that '*I'm not Selwyn'* is an *expression* now when people don't know answers!"

He...he *hadn't* known that.

"I don't know if you *could* beat Skylar in a duel," Luna sniffled, still seeming incredibly upset, "but I know you're a better wizard than he is."

I'm not good enough. I need to beat him. I need to beat him.

Luna lifted one arm and pointed upwards. Adrian followed where she aimed, and in the shadows of the room he could barely see the flickering shapes of birds. They had remained the entire time, whereas Luna had been forced to conjure them time after time.

Actually, Luna had to redo her lumos spell as well many times.

"Could you teach me?" Luna asked, her voice was muffled by the stone but still easily heard, "How to cast spells?"

Adrian shook his head slightly, "I'm not a teacher."

Luna shrugged, the herb bags attached to her earrings swung slightly in the air below her ears, "I think you could be a good one. I think you'd be good at writing books."

Adrian gave a rough bark of laughter, "I don't think *anyone* would care to listen to me."

Luna pouted, looking much more relaxed as the conversation moved from dangerous topics, "I'd listen. I think what you have to say would be very fascinating."

Adrian huffed and Luna smiled, tentitive as if asking an unspoken apology for her previous actions.

"I'd even run what you write in the Quibbler." She piped up hopefully, "*My name is Adrian, I'm a very powerful wizard and very intelligent although I don't think I am."* She mimicked him, pitching her voice low and incredibly off key.

Adrian mimed her back, "*My name is Luna and I like to feed omens of death barefoot in winter."*

Luna scoffed, jerking her head to the side as if to give him a cold shoulder. "I still think you should write. People would like it."

Adrian frowned, "People don't want to hear anything, I'd be labeled as a Death Eater sympathizer."

Luna looked out of the window once more, her face was illuminated by both the spells and the faint moonlight shimmering through the panes. She looked as beautiful as a goddess, and as sad as one.

"I think people like to hear that sometimes others are as sad as they are."

"I'm not sad," Adrian spoke.

She sighed, wilting as if he had failed some great test of hers. Adrian didn't know that there even *was* a test.

"I should get going, it's become quite late." She looked wistful, a sardonic smile that looked strange on her face.

"We've been chatting a while," he confessed, looking upwards towards the rafters as one of the birds chirped loudly.

"You should end them." Luna added, traversing the distance to lean against his side heavily, "I think they'd stay here all night if you don't."

They probably would; Adrian ended the spell.

"Goodnight Adrian," Luna spoke in a soft tone of voice, "remember that the sad thoughts pass."

Adrian grinned a contemptuous smile; not at her but at the notion that he was sad. "I'm not sad."

She searched him with a keen eye, "You aren't useless either.

I'm useful! I'm useful!

Adrian flinched away, taking a full step back. Luna stood there, pausing for the slightest of moments before she vacated the room.

A snowflake drifted slowly to the window. It melted with a sharp stab of ice, leaving a wet trail down towards the cobblestone. Adrian smiled something incongruous to the harrowing twang in his chest.

Maybe he *should* head back to his room, his bones did ache so terribly so. He must have moved wrong and pulled something, it would explain the throbbing in his knees.

He knew he should go back to the dungeons, he mentally traced his path and the idea wasn't in any way unappealing. He would be happy to tell Lutain about how *angry* Daphne had been. He could tell his friend about Krum, and how surprisingly accepting the man was.

He *knew,* that he should descend the quiet hallways and nestle in the comfort of his room.

Instead, Adrian closed his eyes and tilted his head backwards until his skull touched the uncomfortable stone wall behind him.

Despite Luna's company, the night was very isolating, and for some incomprehensible reason, Adrian felt that he deserved it.

Adrian didn't get up for his classes the next day.

Theo genuinely hadn't expected it. Sure, he had lived with the other boy for *years,* often Adrian had expressed a state of lethargy that was impressive. Theo had *thought* that was increasing slightly, even in minor things. Adrian seemed to pause or hesitate when prompted to leave or stop sitting, Adrian procrastinated activities until the last moment. He even retired early often, sleeping for tremendous amounts of time although he always seemed as if he hadn't slept well. Theo thought that the other boy was just ignoring them, like how he didn't often go with them to get dinner or likely snuck down to the kitchens.

But Adrian hadn't ever just...not gotten up.

Professor Moody seemed to notice too, he had an even deeper scowl when he spotted the empty desk.

Theo twitched and his fingers itched for something to play with, he settled for vigorously shaking his leg. He saw Crabbe grunt and scowl at how the adjacent desk vibrated wildly with Theo's shaking.

Theo's quill wobbled and fell off of his desk, fluttering to the ground as Moody continued on with his very vocal, and very terrifying tirade about reversing bone-based curses.

Theo sighed quietly, if Adrian were there, he would have at least brought his bloody snake.

Knowing their luck, if they had to cast anything he would have gotten it right first try. Instead, Theo was stuck partnering with Crabbe and hoping they managed to scrape by with the least amount of personal injury.

Professor Moody continued on with his tirade, and Theo occupied himself with doodling nonsensical shapes on the corner of his notes. *Anything* would be a better distraction than this.

Theo got back to the dorm and practically sprinted through the hall towards the door. Draco followed, a bit slower but twice as smug.

"I *still* can't believe he skipped," Draco nearly hummed, very pleased with just how angry Moody had been.

That caused Theo to pause, "What do you mean? Haven't you noticed he's sleeping a lot?"

Draco rolled his eyes, "Why in Merlin's name would I pay attention to how he *sleeps?"*

Theo blushed, he felt his cheeks warm and he stumbled over an excuse, "I mean, I just...he's been sleeping a lot, ya know? And he doesn't really interact with us much anymore and-"

"Well *obviously,"* Draco sneered, "He's gone off his bloody rocker ever since he's been taken in by that *mutt.* No, ever since he went and got his arse cursed all the way to the astronomy tower."

Theo's heart thumped heavily, "You shouldn't say that, Draco."

Draco looked incredulous, "It's true. You know he deserved it, acting like the emperor for years. What, you've gone soft on him?"

Theo flinched and tried to ignore Draco, but he couldn't when the other boy grabbed his shoulder and spun him around. Draco's stockier build and sharper features were much more overpowering than Theo's own thin and nervous body.

"Nott, you can't *honestly* be protecting him." Draco's tone went higher in pitch even as he lowered his voice to a hush, "You know that he's not *special,* right? He's just...wild. "

"I…" Theo gulped, blinking wildly.

It was no use.

Draco had entered a rant.

Merlin save him.

"Have you even *listened* to anything Greengrass has mentioned? All of the strange things she's gathered about that *Mudblood?"*

But...Adrian was a Pureblood, wasn't he?

"And you remember when he lunged at that younger student, that first year-"

"He wouldn't have hurt her." Theo defended. It sounded lame in his ears.

"He sent that snake *at her,"* Draco's voice had lowered into an accusatory hiss, "He's raised by *Bellatrix Lestrange. That's* why that mangy dog of a teacher stole him, kept him away. He probably knows all these secrets, or they want to keep an eye on him. And now that those bloody

deals of him went up in flame, he's trying to plot out a new plan."

Theo's jaw trembled and he tried to find it in him to defend Adrian, but truly Draco hadn't said anything wrong yet. "What has Daphne been saying?"

Draco glanced up and down the hallway, seeing nobody he leant in closer, his voice practically a whisper. "Greengrass has been with that girl, the one he attacked. Secretly, didn't want him seeing them together. Greengrass says that Selwyn isn't a Pureblood, that he's likely a Mudblood who got adopted, killed his brother or had Lestrange do it for him. Remember that boggart, from last year? The man? Greengrass thinks it was some sort of a... a *blood oath,* why else would Selwyn be so scared of 'em?"

Everything Draco was saying was making sense. Was making painful sense.

"But the worse bit, was way back, Greengrass told me that she *saw him,* the boggart." Draco's voice was barely audible, "At the Station, he picked up Adrian back as a First Year. That means he's still in *contact* with- with *whoever* that was. But he said he was raised by *Bellatrix,* so what's with this suspicious new man? So many things don't make *sense."*

Oh Merlin.

"What should we do?" Theo whined out, twisting his fingers together anxiously.

Draco scoffed, "I don't bloody know, get out of that room with him. Maybe one day you'll wake up, more scarred than he is, or maybe that snake of his will want you as a snack."

Adrian had always been so nice to Theo, he hadn't gone out of his way to antagonize him at all.

But Theo had tried to forget it, he had remembered all of the incidents. He remembered Adrian attacking that first year, he remembered him setting Millicent on *fire…*

Draco was right. Adrian was dangerous.

"If...If he's so dangerous why did everyone go attacking him?" Theo's voice shook slightly.

Draco's expression faltered slightly, a slightly haunted look flashed across his face and then vanished as quickly as it appeared. "An example."

"A- an *example?"*

Draco looked slightly unsure, grudging as if he was reluctant to say anything. "In...*certain groups,* it...I *heard,* that dangerous wizards are made examples of. They learn their place."

"I- Draco what-"

"Listen," Draco hissed under his breath, "Do you *really* think he's going to try anything again? Merlin, he practically *ran* this house. Now he's as tame as a house elf."

Theo's lip trembled slightly, he didn't agree with what Draco was saying. "Draco, he...he sent Millicent-"

Draco huffed out an irritated breath, "He isn't less threatening, he just isn't likely to lash out anymore!"

Something cold and heavy pressed itself over Theo's shoulders, "Then...then if *you* think he's dangerous, why are you and Daphne pushing him so hard?"

"Secrets have power," Draco grimaced, "Selwyn is unpredictable, but he isn't desperate yet. She wants to figure him out and have some sort of leverage, keep him from *ever* holding things over us again."

"You want to chain him," Theo realized with a nauseous sense of amazement, "You want assurance."

"I'm not saying he isn't going to throw punches," Draco warned, "I'd take a few small fights over a brooding despot anyday."

If Theo stayed in Adrian's room with him, it was likely he'd see one of those small fights. It was *more* likely that *he'd* be the target of that fight.

If Adrian *found out* that Theo *knew* what Draco and Daphne were doing...Merlin he'd be chopped meat in front of a werewolf.

"Okay," Theo nodded frantically, "Okay, I'm moving out. Think Goyle has room?"

Draco grimaced sympathetically, "If you're deaf, he snores like a manticore."

Yikes.

Unknown to both boys, a long black snake moved silently near the corner. Moving slowly and smoothly back towards Selwyn's room, already prepared to recite everything that it had heard.

Adrian had heard everything Lutain said.

Adrian didn't get up, nor did he roll over to greet Theo as the thin weed of a boy scampered in and grabbed his things before hurrying out.

Adrian didn't need friends.

He *didn't.*

He sighed quietly, bones aching and head throbbing slightly. He pulled the blankets of his bed higher to his face, sinking into the soft covers far from content.

He didn't *need* friends.

(He wanted them, but Luna had already tried to talk him out of what he needed to do. He couldn't afford any other distractions.)

Adrian sent Krum what he wanted through Hedwig. It may not have been the most inconspicuous way to deliver a package, although Adrian was almost positive none of the seeker's classmates would recognize the bird.

Adrian *knew* that Hermione wanted to talk with him, either for simple pleasantries or to make a deal (how ironic). She saw him once, locking eyes with him over the Great Hall. She shrank back, curling in on herself with an obviously hurt expression.

Lutain had told him that he looked terrible. Adrian didn't care.

She didn't approach him afterwards, and for a blissful while Adrian was left alone. (Excepting Luna, who always appeared at the strangest of times.)

Adrian slept through the second task, he couldn't have cared less if Skylar Potter died.

(Or drowned, as he was later informed).

Viktor had followed through with his side of the bargain. The book he received was hidden well, a spelled front cover to appear as basic charms.

The content was different, much more dark magic in theory and in practice than anything at Hogwarts.

Disappointingly, it was barely more than a book Bellatrix had given him years back. He already knew most of the spells inside of it- the ones he didn't looked more useful as petty hexes.

What a disappointment.

Adrian's room was a *mess.*

It hadn't been a problem, until he *lost* his essay.

For Moody.

Which seemed rather indicative of everything so far.

He was forced to go to Moody's office, as soon as possible. To apparently discuss not only his poor assignment, but his recent streak of missing classes in favor of sleeping.

Adrian had a bad feeling about the meeting, especially since the fateful night Moody had taken him into the Forbidden Forest and confessed that he wasn't *actually* Mad-Eye Moody.

Didn't mean that he wouldn't attack Adrian, especially since the confirmed rumor was that Moody had a knack for using spells as punishment. Adrian was sure to bring Lutain with him.

Moody's room was dark, broken by the ticking noise of a spelled clock. A stack of papers on his desk, likely the assignment Adrian never turned in.

The man wasn't in the open areas of the room, which only made Adrian's paranoia spike.

The far door swung open with a clatter, the large man stumbled forward on his prosthetic leg while magical eye swung around wildly. He spotted Adrian, and an unsettling mad grin spread across his scarred mouth.

"Selwyn!" The Professor shouted joyously, stomping across the room and drawing his wand. Adrian tensed, gasping quietly and taking a sharp step backwards. Moody ignored it, and instead cast something wildly over his shoulder towards the walls of stone. The spell hit and the stone flashed blue- a silencing ward.

So it was time to talk to Crouch, not Moody.

"Not a social call?" Adrian inquired weakly, pointedly stroking Lutain's small scales. Crouch spotted the movements and only grinned further.

"You're scared," He noticed almost pleased, "Good, grab that fear and hang onto it. I've heard a bit about you, you're slacking."

Adrian bristled, and opened his mouth to argue but snapped his jaw shut when Crouch tapped his wand pointedly.

"You're falling behind in all your classes, turning in shite or not showing up at all." Crouch scoffed, wiggling his eyebrows in a way that *somehow* came across condescending, "Careful there, starting to think something's *getting to you."*

Adrian swallowed, and shook his head quietly.

Crouch grinned, stumbling over to his desk and sitting down heavily, rubbing his stump with a wince, "Lucky for you, I've got something to fix that."

"What?" Adrian spoke, voice a lot quieter than it should have been.

"I have a way to make you less bloody useless," Crouch clarified.

Adrian flinched.

He, he *knew.* He had...He didn't know.

Luna had *insisted* that he was a strong wizard, but she was biased on what strange relationship they shared. Of course she would lie to make him happier, of *course* he couldn't trust her.

Crouch was neutral party, he had no reason to lie.

There was some sort of dawning realization that had sunk into him, like a sickness. A confirmation that all of his doubts and stewing thoughts were right- were valid. Crouch had been right before, calling him disposable.

Perhaps that was why his father was ignoring him, not letting him in on the big plan.

Even Adalonda had told him as much, right to his face with no sense of apology.

He *was* useless.

"I'm not…" Adrian tried to protest, but it was pathetically weak even to his own ears.

"Master…" Lutain trailed off quietly, having been almost silent the entire meeting.

Lutain was more useful than Adrian was, he had the power of life or death in his very *maw.*

Maybe that's why Adrian's father had looked at Lutain so fondly, had stroked him so gently and praised his scales. Lutain could be sneaky, he could be a spy or a weapon, he could be utilized and unquestionably *a threat.*

Adrian just...Adrian just *hurt.*

"Oh you are, you're about as useful as that Longbottom boy, except *he* hasn't gotten into any trouble. You're already as good as muggle dirt, the filth under the boots of others. Half the school thinks you're a one potion sale away from Azkaban, and the other half thinks you're taking them yourself."

That…

Adrian's jaw was trembling wildly.

Is that what his father saw?

"I don't see what the Dark Lord could see in you, except maybe a meat sack to take the blame, maybe a scapegoat to pin the blame on. You're not good enough to really even feed the Dark Lord's snake, bloody useless I say."

Adrian felt a low whine bubble from his throat, something wounded and *pathetic.* Luna said he was powerful, Luna said he was useful.

You're not. The self-depreciation sang, like a swarm of locusts.

Crouch grinned wider, something savage in his eyes as he spoke nothing but the truth.

"Looking at that face, I think Bellatrix had the right idea using you for target practice. That's all you are, and you know that too, don't you?"

You're disposable.

Adrian was crying, because it was true. Verbally admitting this, having someone *confirm* the darkest suspicions in his head...

"I found something, that would make you useful." Crouch added, kicking both feet up onto his desk, "Make you something better."

Better. Stronger.

"A spell?" Adrian asked, his voice something so obviously distressed it made Adrian feel all that worse.

"Potion," Crouch's eyes were unreadable, something akin to a starving dog, staring at a feast before it. "Complicated one, tricky to find. Abilities similar to those undead you fancy so much. *Well,* not really. Not at all actually."

"What?" Adrian whispered, not comprehending around the chaotic swirl in his head.

Crouch leant forward, bracing his arms on his desk as he stared at Adrian sternly, "I'm going to make you *useful,* something the Dark Lord'll be pleased to have. You want to please him, don't you? He'll be *very* pleased, so pleased."

Crouch could help him please his father. He knew something, or he knew what his father wanted.

"Master, I don't think…"

Adrian shook his head, sharply. He had forgotten his familiar was so close, but Lutain couldn't understand. Lutain didn't have the ability to understand human concepts, he didn't understand the *need* to make his father proud.

Lutain couldn't help him.

But...but Crouch *could.*

'Why are you throwing what you have aside to...to impress someone? What are you trying to do?'

Luna was right. He was a Slytherin, and he most certainly was ambitious.

He stared at Crouch like something small and quiet.[3] Something wide eyed and innocent and

verging on the edge of tears.

How inquisitive, how pitifully *naive.* If only he could look at himself from another's perspective.

"You can do that?" Adrian asked quietly, blinking owlishly and trying to fight off the moisture welling in the corners of his eyes, "You can make him like me? You can teach me to be better?"

Crouch nodded slowly, disguised face shifting into something gentle and crooning like a siren's song. Loud and dominating, overbearing on the faint echoes of Luna's assurances.

Trust me, I can help you.

I can make you something better.

I can make him love you.

You've always wanted that, haven't you?

"Yes," Adrian whispered, "Yes I want that."

Sirens always did prey on the weakness of men.

"Good," Crouch grinned, his expression far too gone in the depths of insanity even for Moody's face, "Good, *good*."

The man repeated it a few times, a mantra. Crouch twisted, sending clutter and objects clattering to the floor as he scrambled for something out of sight. He grasped something, a thin flimsy leather book that he flopped onto the desk between them.

Adrian peered at it curiously, although any secrets it hid were well disguised between ink splashes, water warps, and a deep impression something heavy had left on it.

"Take this," Crouch flurried out, his tone revving on something highly energetic, as if he had taken an unnecessary pepper-up potion, "and you are going to *write* in it."

Adrian paused, trying to comprehend how a book was relevant.

"After the potion," Crouch sniffed, his fingers clenching and releasing quickly in his eagerness, "you want it, don't you?"

Adrian startled, "Yes, but..."

"Then take it, and *use* it." Crouch's face twisted into something sour, angry no...*furious*, at Adrian's hesitation, "and for Merlin's sake, keep it *hidden."*

Oh, it was to keep track of Adrian's work. To keep track of his progress, Adrian *knew* how much his father adored the black rebound books he stored on his shelves. He had flipped through one once, a book filled with fine spidery script that was detailed much further than a textbook; a log of information many wizards would die for. His father would certainly like the idea of Adrian following suit, especially since his bartering had gone to the owls.

"Okay," Adrian agreed, picking up the thin scrap of parchment and cheap leather. He wished it was one of the higher quality books he hoarded himself. No, the cover of the book didn't matter.

Adrian could do this.

"Good," Crouch agreed, looking far more relaxed and suddenly much, *much* happier than before, "very good."

Adrian found himself agreeing.

Disease

Chapter Summary

A combination of factors; and the beginning of the end.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is triple length due to a hiatus I will be taking.
After the unfortunate death of my cat- my best friend, I require time to myself.

Adrian woke up one fateful Thursday to a loud rumble of activity down the hall.

Normally, he wouldn't be bothered to get out of his bed, especially since he had equipped the locking charms on his door in place.

"Master?" Lutain inquired, poking his head out from his box.

Adrian ignored him, and curled tighter into his sheets.

Adrian heard the silky noise of Lutain's small scales sliding over the woven blanket around his shoulders.

"Master, they are closer."

"I don't have classes until this afternoon," Adrian mumbled back, voice thick with sleep as he didn't even bother to open his eyes.

"It is after noon," Lutain hissed back pointedly, voice deadpanned with the noticeable trace of concern.

Was it? He had slept through Charms.

The loud grumble of voices and many feet paused, standing quietly outside his room.

The door burst open with a rattling *bang* which impacted against the stone of the wall behind it, bouncing free and nearly closing it once more. Adrian startled, lifting himself onto one forearm as the other rapidly rubbed his eyes.

His lights were forced on and two imposing figures stormed across his room, grabbing his arms and hoisting him from his bed. Adrian protested with a squawk, sounding like Blaise's strange bird he had smuggled in.

"Let me go!" Adrian struggled, legs flailing behind him as he was *dragged* out of his room into the hallway, "What the bloody hell do you-"

Adrian's protests faltered weakly when he saw what the ruckus was about. Adrian's Head of House,

Professor Snape, was standing with both arms crossed wielding an expression of downright umbrage.

Adrian struggled upwards once the two students released him (prefects, he recognized). He sniffed, trying to form some sort of decency with his disorderly hair and sleep glazed expression.

Snape's lip curled, his eyes almost narrowing as he observed Adrian's ill-composed self.

Adrian's scars itched from the scrutiny. Especially towards his left side, just along his chest.

"What do we have here," Snape spoke, each word soft and gentle. In Adrian's sleep suffocated brain, he almost giggled at the comparison to lacewing fly wings.

"Something funny, Mr. Selwyn?" Snape asked softly, "because I am not seeing any humor in this situation."

Adrian's smallest smile slipped off his face, "No sir."

"Then what, exactly, were you doing in your bed? Certainly not fulfilling those *eight assignments* you've failed to turn in."

Adrian's stomach twisted, pressing against his sternum painfully. He swallowed convulsively, trying his best not to show just how uncomfortable he was.

Snape was a *teacher,* he knew exactly how to see it anyways.

"No…" Adrian cleared his throat quietly, noticing how his first attempts to speak came out a whisper, "No sir."

"And *what,* were you doing then, Mr. Selwyn?"

Snape was much worse than Bellatrix ever was.

Adrian's heartbeat raced in his ears, almost drowning out his shakily replied, "Sleeping, sir."

"Sleeping." Snape repeated, as if he hadn't heard him. Everyone knew he heard just fine.

"Isn't that peculiar, as you've been skipping classes all throughout the morning for the past...how long?"

Adrian swallowed, his skin itched. "... couple weeks, sir."

"Past *month,"* Snape corrected, finally showing his first snap of anger, "but that's not why I'm here."

"It isn't?" Adrian asked impulsively. The second after he spoke, he froze, mentally berating *why did he say that.*

Snape stilled, chewing his cheek in justified anger at being interrupted.

Adrian froze, nearly trembling. Snape paused to compose himself.

Lutain slithered out from the room quietly, sticking to the edges of the wall and not venturing into the commotion. Adrian only saw him from his peripheral, although he relaxed considerably with his familiar at his side.

"I am here, because I have been informed of some rather...*disappointing* rumors." Snape's tone sent shivers down Adrian's spine.

Stay calm, he'll only shout for a while and then he'll go away.

"The Headmaster has asked me *why,* Mr. Karkaroff is accusing *you* of being an illegal artifact and potion dealer, Mr. Selwyn, especially one who sold illegal goods to a *Triwizard Competitor."*

Oh. Krum.

Adrian bit his tongue so he wouldn't bite out how the potion *wasn't* illegal.

"Do you have any idea, how I must feel, Mr. Selwyn." Snape drawled, just shy of ice cold.

Adrian blinked twice and weakly offered, "Disappointed?"

There was a low hush of voices, people who had been watching the altercation without actually being close enough for Adrian to notice.

Oh Merlin, was the entire *common room* here?

Snape's nostrils flared and Adrian instantly knew he had said the wrong thing.

"*Disappointed,"* he echoed with a click of his tongue, "How...unfortunate. I would have expected you to defend yourself with something more, especially as you see yourself above classes, Mr. Selwyn. Perhaps you feel that you are *above* your fellow peers?"

Adrian's heart plummeted and he shook his head, too afraid to verbally speak up.

"Or," Snape paused, eying Adrian with a coolly dismissive expression.

Adrian braced himself, he knew it was going to hurt.

"*Or,"* Snape continued, almost oozing satisfaction, "perhaps your temporary dwelling over the summer has gifted you a sense of superiority instilled by James Potter, and the *great* Skylar Potter himself?"

Oh, oh *no.*

"Perhaps," Snape's lip twitched slightly, "you would prefer I escort you to the headmaster to have you resorted immediately. Something more...*fitting,* for your outlandish behaviour and idiotic *mindset."*

A knut dropping could have been heard across the entire room.

"You are *lucky,* that the Headmaster finds it in himself to repay the late Professor Lupin for his service here at Hogwarts. Otherwise, I along with many others would *gladly* offer our position in regards to your continued education at Hogwarts. You remain here not because you are unique, or through a sense of compassion for your personal difficulties."

Snape pulled his arms behind his back, leaning forward to tower over the still shorter boy, his lips curled back like an angry dog. "You stay here, due to *luck.* Best you know that, *Mr. Selwyn."*

Adrian breathed shakily, ignoring the weight on his chest to the best of his ability. His hands felt cold, his shoulders shook ever so slightly.

Adrian hung his head, staring down at his bare feet as his voice whispered over and over through his skull in an uncontrolled mantra *'You messed up, you messed up, you messed up…'*

Snape seemed satisfied, Adrian couldn't quite tell but he could hear the gentle swishing of his robes as he walked towards the exit to the castle.

"Mr. Selwyn," he called over his shoulder intentionally, "you are required to meet Madam Pomfrey for a potions test, as well as report to Professor Moody who has graciously taken control of your detentions. You will report to him *every day,* after dinner. If you fail to show, the Headmaster will have no choice but to intervene. You are fortunate the Triwizard Tournament has him occupied. Do I make myself clear?"

Adrian's hands were shaking; terribly so.

"Yes sir," He repeated, still not lifting his head. It couldn't have been loud enough for Snape to have heard, yet the man made a small noise of satisfaction.

Adrian felt and saw the drops land, just shy of his big toe. They reflected the light in a way similar to Lutain's scales.

"...Selwyn, mate," Adrian heard Theo say quietly. His words were pinched, as if they pained him to even speak up in the quiet.

Adrian didn't say anything, he just turned and quietly padded down the hallway, back to his room. The quiet click was almost a joke after the deafening bang.

Theo visibly wilted, his entire body sinking as he curled in on himself.

"I've never seen him that angry," Draco muttered as the slow buzz of the room started up again, "He was *furious."*

"You think he did it? Sold potions to *Victor Krum?"*

Draco paused, "I hope not, it would be bloody awful if Krum was disqualified. Worse if *Potter* won."

The two boys waited, both seeming to come to a similar statement that drew their attention.

"You think Selwyn actually *lived* with the Potters?" Theo questioned, peering down the hallway as if Adrian would emerge once again, "Lived with the Golden Boy?"

Draco snorted, "No wonder he's been acting like a broom's up his arse. Bet he's jealous of all the attention, I've heard of dozens of wizards going bonkers with potions after something like that."

Theo looked uncertain, "But...But Adrian's always been so *nice."*

Draco rolled his eyes, "Priorities, Nott. Selwyn might get *expelled,* if Professor Snape wants him gone, we should too."

Theo worried his bottom lip between two teeth, "I dunno mate, something doesn't seem right."

Draco rolled his eyes and looked somewhere between disgusted and annoyed, "Merlin knows I wouldn't want Greengrass to dig that closely either then. Lestrange did him a favor, marking him up like that."

Theo's brow furrowed but he didn't say anything else.

"Here you go, dear." Madam Pomfrey tittered, passing over a clear potion held in a crystal goblet, "just spit, like you boys always are."

Adrian didn't say anything. He waited, gathering enough saliva to satisfy the woman before hacking it into the goblet. On contact, the potion fizzled slightly and shifted to a light turquoise.

Madam Pomfrey hummed slightly, taking back the cup and setting it on the cart. She poured the slightest bit into a smaller vial before she sealed it, setting it into a small storage box that looked brand new.

Adrian didn't miss the way on the lid it had in bold print, *Selwyn, H.*

"Sorry for such a messy test," Pomfrey apologized sincerely, "potions sink into the gums, saliva is far better than hair, harder to fool too!" She continued friendly.

Adrian didn't say anything, he didn't look at her.

"Are you alright, dear?" Madam Pomfrey frowned, peering at him concerned. She paused, worrying her bottom lip gently before she grabbed the nearest stool. It made a loud racket as she tugged it across the stone floor, close enough to take a seat on.

"Mr. Selwyn, I'm sure there's nothing to be worried about." she assured gently, tilting her head to try and meet his eyes with her own, "I've heard you've been oversleeping. Nightmares?"

Adrian sighed quietly, meeting her eyes and looking away slowly, "No, Ma'am."

Pomfrey's face softened. "Has your scar been bothering you? Mr. Lupin was quite concerned that it would pain you."

Adrian swallowed thickly, "No, Ma'am."

Pomfrey frowned, looking at Adrian a bit closer, "Mr. Selwyn, you look a bit thin, are you eating alright?"

Her heart lurched when she spotted the *smallest* tensing of the younger boy, already thin as he was.

"Everything we talk about will be just between us, you know that?" She assured softly, "It's alright, you can tell me, Mr. Selwyn. I won't tell your Head of House."

"Or Dumbledore?" Adrian asked back, voice almost listless as he fumbled his fingers together.

"Or the Headmaster, unless you're in danger." She assured, eyebrows knitted together as worry began to gnaw at her.

Adrian exhaled heavily, his entire body moving to hunker forward.

"...I haven't been hungry."

Pomfrey nodded slightly, "That's alright, Mr. Selwyn. It's important to have three meals a day, how many do you think you've been managing?"

Adrian shrugged, "...one?"

That was concerning, especially with his peculiar sleep schedule. If he had been eating more, she would have suspecting an oncoming growth spurt.

"How many hours do you think you've been sleeping? Or do you have problems falling asleep?"

Adrian shrugged one shoulder, disinterested with the conversation, "I don't know, maybe twelve."

"Are you tired now? After waking up?" Pomfrey inquired, already thinking of various dreamless sleep potions she could offer the boy.

Adrian *finally* looked at her, although it was one of confusion as if her question was rhetorical, "...yes? I'm *always* tired."

Pomfrey nodded slowly, "Boys your age often grow, it's possible you're anticipating a growth spurt."

Adrian scoffed and swung his leg sourly, "I wish It would just happen then. My bones hurt."

Alarm bells rung in Pomfrey's mind.

"...I remember Hagrid telling us about you helping him, have you talking to him about this?"

Adrian rolled his eyes as if the question was stupid. Then he paused, and looked as if he considered it seriously, "No, I haven't seen Hagrid in a while."

"I thought you helped him with various creatures he housed near the forest? He has a new Hippogriff, after the unfortunate accident last year."

Adrian's face twitched, "I didn't know that…"

Pomfrey's breathing paused, "He's had it since the start of this year, Mr. Selwyn."

Adrian gave a small uninterested shrug.

Pomfrey stood up with a false smile painted on her face. Adrian spotted it and scowled, almost instantly she removed it.

"I have a few questions more, Mr. Selwyn, then you can be on your way."

Adrian sighed heavily, then he pulled his legs up and turned to occupy the entire space of the cot instead of sitting on it halfway. He folded his arms, closing his eyes as he waited for her.

She fumbled for the book in question, trying not to think too much on it. She slid through the table of contents, trying to find the pages describing *Youth Magical Diseases of the Mind.*

She cleared her throat uncomfortably, trailing one finger over the parchment as she reached symptoms.

'Well, he certainly described fatigue and exhaustion,' she thought solemnly.

"Please answer my questions honestly, Mr. Selwyn, and feel free to elaborate or ask me to if you don't understand."

Adrian's face twitched again and she received the impression he was annoyed with her.

"Do you always feel tired, Mr. Selwyn?"

He scoffed, adjusting himself on the bed, "I always feel tired, no matter how much I sleep. I thought we already went over that?"

"Just checking," she soothed, "is your room messy? Is that why you have missing assignments?"

He was quiet, eyes fluttering open although staring upwards at the roof of the hospital wing, "...yes. It's messy, but...that's not why I haven't done the assignments, I mean, I lost one but I just…" he struggled to think of words, "...I can't concentrate, and It's not worth it."

"We can work on that, you're a very intelligent young man."

Adrian dismissed it with an eye roll, "*Right,* is that why I'm always getting into trouble then?"

"Are you?"

Adrian's jaw twitched, locking as Pomfrey hurried to change the questions, "What about your friends? Do you go out often with them?"

Adrian looked at her dryly with one eyebrow raised, "What friends?"

"I'm sure you have friends, Mr. Selwyn. I'm sure they miss doing things with you."

"Oh, you mean getting interrogated and annoyed by them *again?* They just...*ugh."* He groaned, entire body tense at the concept.

Pomfrey turned the page of her book quietly, "Do they frustrate you? Is is because of your appearance?"

Adrian huffed something that could have been a laugh, "I don't feel like taking care of my appearance. Not that it would do anything with…" he waved one hand over his face, close enough to brush one of the largest veins of painful looking scar tissue, "I'm ugly. I don't care, people are irritating and classes are irritating and…" Adrian grunted sourly, already looking agitated.

"That's alright, Mr. Selwyn." Pomfrey was struggling to remain calm, "Just a few more questions I'm afraid. Do you ever feel like you have a racing heart?"

Adrian glanced at his fingers, playing with them intently as if to avoid the questions.

"...sometimes, it's…" he struggled, fingers twitching noticeably, "...it's loud, and it's hard to breathe. It's dizzy, like when you fall off a broom."

Pomfrey nodded slightly, closing her book and sliding it further away from both of them, "I can offer a few Pepper-up potions, only for sparse use, and Draught of Peace, Merlin knows you students need them with your O.W.L.s," Pomfrey smiled, reaching for her quill to scribble something on an official looking piece of parchment, "And One of the Euphoria Elixirs, but *only* when needed."

Adrian looked baffled, almost as if Pomfrey had suggested he take a draught of the Living Dead, "Euphoria Elixir? Why do I need *that?"*

'Oh you poor child,' Madam Pomfrey thought solemnly, "I have more in stock than Invigoration Draught, I really do need to contact St. Mungos, Merlin knows they haven't been returning my owls."

Adrian nodded, although still looked puzzled by her description, as if he hadn't realized something was wrong.

Pomfrey jumped slightly when she realized that the poor boy likely *didn't* think anything was

wrong, that he was there simply for a potions test.

"Off you tot, I'll have these sent to your bed later tonight." Madam Pomfrey clicked her tongue, knowing full well his later engagement with Professor Moody just after dinner, "Go! Go on! Go have dinner! I don't want to see you back here unless you're coughing slugs!"

Adrian smiled slightly, a much lesser reaction than she was hoping for. "Thank you, ma'am."

Such a sweet child. It almost pained her to see him turn and walk away so stiffly, verging on the border of too slow although she doubted he was aware of it.

He walked on, closing the door behind him.

She sighed heavily, looking at the locked cabinet where she stored the school's supply of potions for medical purposes.

Well, it wouldn't hurt to give him *one* Invigoration Draught.

"You said the Quibbler used to run political articles?" Adrian asked blandly.

Luna hummed, swinging her feet back and forth as they sat in an abandoned classroom. Luna somehow found him only minutes after he secured the door.

"We did," Luna confirmed, trailing a bubble the size of her head on the tip of her wand, "nobody wanted to read it, they were much more fascinated by all of the magical creatures."

Your paper lost legitimacy Adrian realized with a sour taste in his mouth, *knowing you, you must have been too accurate.*

"So you know about politics?" Adrian asked carefully, "or just the idea?"

Luna peered over her shoulder at him, "I know a bit, more than most I think."

"I've been thinking about the war," Adrian confessed quietly, "There's a lot that I don't understand."

Luna nodded sympathetically, pushing the sparkling bubble through the air before it popped with a dazzling array of sparkles. She smiled, delighted at the colors, "What a strange thing, war."

Adrian nodded absentmindedly, "It's confusing."

"It isn't. Not really." Luna sighed quietly, looking far too insightful for someone wearing bottle cork's in her hair, "It's all about power. The world is chaos, don't you know?"

Adrian paused, "I...that's rather pessimistic to say. I thought you'd be more happy."

Luna shrugged a small roll of her shoulder, "I'm right. Everyone in this world is scared. People, groups, governments, countries…" She trailed off, conjuring another bubble to float above her, "Everyone demands power, because they think that'll protect them most."

Adrian's mouth twitched slightly, "But not you."

Luna's mouth quirked into something sardonic, it looked strange on her features.

"I think, that in the effort to help those we love, we stumble onto things far worse than what we would have done originally."

"That's insightful."

She shrugged, twirling a bubble on the tip of her wand.

"If not through power, how else?" Adrian prodded curiously, "I mean like, you said that power isn't the way to rule."

"I didn't say that." She bit out sharply, pausing as if considering her words carefully, "I...*believe,* that it's better to be loved than feared by your people."

"Are you saying you love the minister?"

Luna gave him an expression so annoyed, Adrian cracked a small smile at the expression. It was strangely endearing.

"I think that people are the way to ruling," She clarified quietly, "I mean- I don't think we should be discussing this. People may get the wrong idea."

"People already have the wrong idea."

"But…"

"Oh honestly, you think anyone else *hasn't* thought about how they'd rule the world? Find their way to global conquest?"

Her bubble popped, and she paused a frightening amount of time. Adrian felt something cold press on his lungs- had he pressed too far? Had he said something abhorrent to her?

"I suppose you're right." Luna tentatively added, "I mean, I hear from my housemates all about the minister."

Adrian nodded and with his own wand, cast one of the large bubbles Luna had been entertaining herself with. She looked touched at the offering.

"Well, first we need to get rid of Fudge." Luna huffed, crossing her arms as she craned her neck back to watch the bubbles drift around, "He's so...so…"

Adrian tilted his head in thought, "I thought he was terrified of Dumbledore?"

Luna looked in thought for a second, "You're right. Maybe you keep Fudge."

"Oh, that'd be an idea." Adrian teased with a small smile, "You looking for a puppet in office?"

Luna rolled her eyes playfully, "Well, you don't need power to take over I don't think. I wouldn't want to hurt anyone. A peaceful revolution."

Adrian snorted at the thought, "I don't think that will ever happen."

"It's a nice thought," Luna defended, "Keep Fudge, maybe spread propaganda."

"Through the papers?"

"No no, they'd be obvious to track. Through the peddlers, and the street stalls in Diagon." Luna listed on her fingers, "Through the bar keepers and the potion suppliers, through students on holiday until everywhere is buzzing with what you want to say."

Adrian's mouth twitched slightly, "And what would your propaganda say, free the vampires?"

Luna scoffed at the idea, "Of course, I'd run a campaign and my promise would be equal loo rights for mermish."

Adrian laughed, a startled noise that made Luna smile slightly. She shook her head, thinking seriously for a second, "I think i'd make people panic."

"That seems counterproductive." Adrian paused, blinking in surprise, "I mean- don't you want to praise yourself-"

"No," Luna chewed on her lip in thought, "If...If I *really was* trying to do something...I'd spread panic. I'd make everyone worry and afraid until they look to a single figure, and then I'd have them discredited."

Adrian tilted his head, encouraging her to continue as she gained momentum, "They'd...they'd be discredited, and nobody would know what was real or fake. And you could step forward with the truth, and when people tried to see if you're lying well...you're not." She blinked in thought, "They'd only find out you were right all along."

Adrian felt almost chilled by the viciousness of the girl, "How would you discredit them?"

"I'd find a secret, or a mistake they made." Luna chewed on her lip in thought, "I'd find something that they'd consider their greatest mistake, and I'd show everyone like my sheets on my clothesline."

Oh.

The third task was a maze, at least that was public knowledge.

It wasn't like Adrian would be *watching it*.

Karkaroff, the Headmaster of Durmstrang, was *furious* over Dumbledore's refusal to expel Adrian. The only condition that Dumbledore seemed to soothe the man over with was Adrian's monitoring during the third task.

So he couldn't 'intervene'.

(Adrian didn't care.)

Of course, Moody had taken interest in the boy, something Dumbledore was quite amused by, given Adrian's track record of stealing the hearts of Defence Teachers.

(Professor Lockhart was a train wreck, and Professor Potter's interactions was the personified visage of a blasting hex.)

It wasn't as if Adrian could correct him, especially with how sad the phoenix looked, perched on its roost above.

Adrian didn't say anything during the meeting, only a quiet '*yes Sir,'* and after that, his detention with Moody.

Who was actually Crouch. What a strange concept, that Adrian knew something that the Headmaster didn't.

The Third Task was to begin at dusk, which left Adrian knocking on Professor Moody's office just before the students began to file out to the quidditch pitch. The door swung open instantly, Moody looked more suspicious than usual.

"You alone?" He grunted out, voice gruff as his fake eye lolled around.

"Yes?" Adrian asked, voice rising in confusion, "Not Lutain, he's shedding and doesn't want to move much."

Crouch paused and frowned, "Who the bloody hell is that?"

Adrian shifted his weight uncertain, "My...my familiar?" *the snake?*

Moody gave a grunt and grabbed Adrian's shoulder, yanking him inside. Adrian stumbled through, barely catching his balance as the office door behind him clicked and rattled with an obscene number of locks.

"Alright, that basilisk beast of yours, from the forest-"

"Adalonda?" Adrian interrupted, already feeling off balance with the situation, "What about her? She's not in the task-"

"Forget about the task!" Moody blustered, stumbling past Adrian towards a heavily locked chest. Already he was struggling to open the many locks into a secret compartment, "I'm not waiting here to babysit a *brat,* take this and go to the chamber or wherever that thing lives."

"What?" Adrian struggled to keep up, it felt as if his brain was only working at half the speed it usually would.

"*Go!"* Moody hissed, stumbling once more, nearly into a cabinet as he blinked rapidly and off guard. One hand flew to his head, pressing against his temple with a grimace, "go, take this and get out of here."

Adrian fumbled and held the black bottle, something larger than a standard potions vial and completely black. It had a cork stopper, and felt cold like stone.

"What is this?" Adrian stumbled over his own tongue, "Where are you going? Crouch? Crouch!"

"Bollocks!" Crouch cursed as he teetered, knocking into a cabinet as if he was struck with vertigo, "get out of here, brat! I've got Potter to deal with! *Go!"*

Adrian flinched but nodded, grasping the stone cold bottle with clammy hands. The scene was similar to Bella, often when she was in a similar state Adrian hid himself away until the worst had passed. He didn't think Crouch had episodes, he seemed impressively composed the entire year. Maybe Adalonda would have an idea, she would *have* to have an idea.

He stumbled out of the room after Crouch, hesitating once with a low sound as he glanced at the dungeons.

Lutain was shedding, he wouldn't need to be disturbed over Crouch helping him, besides, Lutain had always been a bit skeptic of Crouch's help. Adalonda would have a better idea.

Adrian ran, his boots slapping on the floor as he hurried up the staircases and twisted through groups of students already descending to the quidditch pitch.

"Watch it!" One group shouted, nearly pressing themselves to the wall as Adrian barreled past, breaths coming heavy in his chest. His lungs burned with the exertion- he was terribly out of shape.

Adrian's bag swung and hit the back of his thighs with every stride, rattling the objects within. He was lucky Lutain wasn't with him.

Adrian skittered past a suit of armor, trying to steady his breathing and make sure that no students were nearby. The portraits were watching him in confusion, already murmuring to one another over his strange actions. His skin prickled and something made his blood cold and yet burn him with pulses of discomfort.

It was probably nothing, he just needed to follow what Crouch said. If Crouch was running or off to do something, it meant that they'd know Adrian wasn't with him. For all intensive purposes, Adrian was being hunted.

Adrian hurried inside the girl's loo, closing the bathroom door behind him. He nearly keeled over, trying to inhale through the harsh gasps he made as his heart thundered in his chest.

The ghost didn't appear, she tended to avoid him like the plague.

"Open," He gurgled out, shucking off his outer robe as the humid hot air of the tunnel buffeted the cold washroom like a sauna. The mirrors fogged up instantly, obscuring his features and hiding his pale clammy face.

The Chamber was more tolerable, a comfortable warmth that was different than the biting cold it once was. Adalonda must have activated some ancient wards, or found a way to change the climate itself.

"Adalonda!" Adrian shouted, running across the stone and shallow puddles as fast as he could, *"Adalonda!"*

There was a skitter of something running, a small squeaking. A second later a thin beady eyed man peered back, squinting at him anxiously.

"Oh!" Wormtail jumped, looking almost savagely around and then at Adrian, "Did you bring food?"

Adrian froze, staring at Wormtail in disbelief, "You've been here all this time?"

Wormtail nodded so fast his head was a blur, he paused, blinking rapidly as his nose twitched, "food?"

"Leave him be, Cerestes, I fear I've driven him mad from fright." Adalonda spoke, her voice a reassuring deep grumble as she emerged from the darkness with glowing eyes. *"You smell different, and you come alone."*

"I didn't bring Lutain, he's shedding. And...and I was told to come here."

"By whom?" Adalonda hissed interested, already trailing her large bulk around the perimeter of the chamber, trapping the terrified Wormtail in a ring of scales, *"your father?"*

"No, the uh, the man who was in the forest. The one who said could help me become stronger, and make me useful for my father." Adrian spoke, a breathless smile twitching at his lips, *"a potion, I think it's some sort of potion that makes my magic stronger."*

Adalonda stopped moving, her body shifting with her deep inhales and exhales.

"A potion?" Adalonda hummed, her voice impossible to read, *"Interesting, high hopes to make yourself useful, Cerastes."*

Wormtail made a small wounded noise and skittered away. Rat feet sprinted back to the shade and protection of a tunnel. It was a marvel he hadn't run off.

"Do you hunt for him?" Adrian asked curiously, he had forgotten about the man.

Adalonda's slightly clouded eyes stared at Adrian as if able to peer through his mind, maybe Basilisks did have legilimency.

"The filth feeds on vermin's prey." Adalonda explained, her voice distorting slightly as her jaws split in a massive yawn, *"let me scent the potion, Cerestes."*

"Of course," Adrian agreed happily, fumbling with the cold black bottle. He held it up to her, staying perfectly still as her long forked tongue kissed the flesh of his fingers and the black stone.

She tasted twice more, staring forward pensively.

"So?" Adrian grinned, already he was feeling anticipation flow through his body.

"Open it," Adalonda commanded, her voice controlled and calm.

Adrian scrambled, his short nails dug into the cork as he struggled to pull it free. It opened with a pop, as well as a strong smell of something *rotting*.

Adrian gagged and nearly dropped the bottle. Adalonda reared back as if something had bludgeoned her snout. Her body twisted, skittering in a reflexive coil which nearly knocked Adrian to the floor.

"What is this thing?" Adrian gagged, holding the bottle as far away as possible, *"It smells like a dead blast ended skrewt."*

Adalonda's eyes were locked on the bottle, her tongue moving almost frantically as it tasted the air.

"Do you know what it is?" Adrian gagged, hopeful that maybe it tasted better than it smelled. He sincerely doubted it.

"Yes. I thought it gone, dead to the lands." Adalonda bent her head, her slight crest catching the light as she stared at the bottle intently, *"He spoke no lie. It will strengthen your magicks."*

Adrian shook the bottle, the sloshing inside indicated it was something very *very* viscous.

"Drink it." Adalonda spoke abruptly, eying Adrian with a look that sent small nagging doubt in the back of his mind.

"Drink it, Cerestes." She hissed, jaw opening and saliva dripping from her teeth in something accidentally terrifying.

Adalonda wouldn't *try* to scare him.

"Alright, Merlin it smells horrid," he grimaced, setting his bag down on the ground before he settled himself on the slightly warmed stone. *"Here goes."*

He tilted the bottle, waiting and waiting for the liquid to reach his lips. He kept tilting until the bottle was nearly vertical, before something slimy and absolutely *disgusting* slowly slid into his mouth. It looked like something molded, pitted with globules like rancid milk.

He had to *chew* it.

Which promptly forced him to jerk his head away and vomit onto the floor. The potion looked dark reddish, almost black yet resembled a moldy peach.

Adalonda made a low rumbling noise of disapproval, watching as Adrian gasped and retched once more. There went the small traces of dinner he managed to force down.

"Drink it," Adalonda ordered.

Adrian nodded, exhaling slowly through his nose trying to stop his gag reflex for the next try for the potion.

He fumbled for the bottle, grimacing and lifting the rim to his mouth with a shaking hand.

Adalonda cooed something lowly as Adrian struggled to hold the potion in his mouth, the texture of meat so far rotten it had begun to melt. It tasted worse.

Adrian flailed slightly, making a pained noise as tears welled from the corners of his eyes, cascading over his cheeks and towards his clenched jaw.

Merlin, it was *so bad.*

"You will be so useful," Adalonda crooned, lowering her head to lay flush to the floor as she encouraged further, *"Your kin will be so pleased. You will be so strong, so fast."*

Adrian whined, and struggled to keep the bile down and swallow the disgusting assault on his palate.

Adalonda drew her head close, flicking her tongue to kiss across his tear tracks, *"Swallow, Cerastes. Swallow and you will be loved."*

Adrian swallowed.

Adrian curled on his side moaning pitifully as one hand traced around his stomach and the other was clutched in his hair.

"Adalonda, I'm dying." Adrian gravely informed her.

Adalonda hummed, having heard the same thing multiple times in the past hour.

"No, for real. You'll have to find Lutain and tell him I died from eating a moldy peach."

"It wasn't a peach," Adalonda informed him amusedly, *"It was blood."*

Adrian froze from his prone position on the ground, *"Blood? Adalonda I had to chew it, it wasn't blood."*

"It was congealed, Cerestes," Adalonda sighed, watching as Adrian paled and gagged although thankfully, kept it down.

Adrian thumped his head back onto the floor, staring up at the ceiling blankly, *"Do you think Crouch checked to see if whoever it was had a disease? I really wouldn't want to catch something."*

Adalonda snorted something which almost sounded like a laugh.

Then Adrian yelped, hands flashing to his shoulder as something tore away, sliding over his neck towards his chest.

"I...father?" Adrian asked confused, tearing his shirt open to look at the tattoo, slithering almost frantically over his exposed skin and distended stomach.

"A message?" Adalonda inquired, not bothering to slither over further, *"What message do you bring, Nagini?"*

The moronic tattoo struggled to comprehend and respond, *"Master ask why Potter at manor."*

Adrian paused, baffled and not understanding, *"I...pardon? Potter? They found the manor? Is there a raid? Is my father okay?"*

"Settle yourself, Cerastes." Adalonda scolded, peering at the tattoo calmly, *"What word, little one?"*

The tattoo slithered uncertain, *"Small. Hatchling at manor. Portkey."*

Adrian surged upwards, wincing as his stomach gurgled loudly, upset at him. What was Skylar Potter doing at the manor? And with a Portkey? How did Skylar Potter even *get there?*

Unless.

"Oh no. Crouch. Crouch made the cup into the Portkey, before he knew that my Father was around, I thought...I thought that he didn't do that. But Crouch ran off, I- I don't know where he is."

The Nagini tattoo paused, absorbing the words before it dug through his skin and out of sight. Adrian would never get used to how disturbing it felt.

Adrian waited, one hand wrapping around his unhappily gurgling stomach as he waited for the tattoo to come back.

It didn't, and it left Adrian reeling with the sudden sense of abandonment.

Thank Merlin he took the potion, maybe if he had taken it sooner and *proved* himself, his father would be in contact more. He hadn't felt so worthless in a long time.

He sighed and drew his legs to his chest, resting his chin on his bony knees. If he had a practice dummy, he could have at least practiced spells. Maybe he could try and find Wormtail again.

"I must have *something,"* Adrian sighed, dragging his bag towards him to rifle through. He had a sealed inkwell, a textbook, a half finished essay due a week ago, a half dozen quills, and a ratty leather book.

No, it was the journal Crouch had thrown at him, ordered him to write in after taking the potion. He pulled it out, glancing at the stained cover consideringly.

It wasn't like the chamber's dirt would make it look worse.

He flipped it open, snatching his wand to cast a small light charm to peer at the paper a bit better. It

wasn't even the high quality paper he preferred, he could tell he'd have to write carefully and large, else the ink smear.

Short paragraphs and updates then. He could do that.

He fished for a quill, drawing it out and peering at his inkwell. There was enough left in there for his essay and then some, he could easily jot down a few notes.

"What should I write, Adalonda?"

Adalonda grumbled wordlessly, somewhere in a doze and unwilling to answer.

Adrian smiled and shook his head fondly, at times Adalonda seemed larger than life, then other times she was as docile as a kneezle.

He opened the inkwell and dipped his favorite quill inside, pausing as he considered what to write.

He didn't want to make it a *diary*, so to speak. It wasn't, it was something to document like Crouch had said.

'It was one of the most disgusting things I've ever experienced.' Adrian wrote carefully, watching as the paper took longer than usual to absorb the ink due to its low quality. *'Adalonda says it was blood. Whatever it was, good thing it came in a black bottle. I'd have lost my nerve if I had to see it.'*

Adrian hummed content with his writing. He didn't really have anything else to say.

"I should probably return back to Lutain, I didn't tell him I'd be down here." Adrian explained to Adalonda, gathering his things and testing to see if the ink had dried.

"Leave the potion." Adalonda grumbled, opening one eye as she watched his movements carefully, *"The tunnel to the belly of the castle."*

"I know the one. I'll put it over by the entrance then, I'll be back soon." Adrian promised, smiling at Adalonda and stroking her scales lovingly.

Adalonda watched him a second longer than he expected, *"Yes, do return, Cerestes. I do worry for you so, little one."*

Adrian grinned, *"I'll miss you. Take care!"*

Adalonda grumbled and watched as he gathered his bag and made his way across the chamber, finding the tunnel in question before hiking his way up and out.

He returned to the cold hallways of the dungeons behind a metal grate, far enough away from the common paths to know he had time to return to his room. If anyone asked, Professor Moody sent him back and left to watch the task himself.

His stomach gurgled loudly and a flash of stabbing pain resonated deep in his gut, leaving him wincing slightly and hurrying back to the common room.

He slipped inside, the entire room vacant for the first time Adrian could remember.

He walked across the room, his footsteps echoing and slipped inside his room. Lutain didn't stir, likely far into the depths of sleep.

Which sounded absolutely *fantastic.*

Adrian shucked off his shirt, changing quickly and wincing as his stomach gave another angry pang. His mattress felt sinfully good compared to the stone floor of the chamber, already the ever prominent exhaustion swept through him.

Adrian dazed, drifted in and out of sleep until once again he stirred due to the chaotic rumble of voices outside his door, growing louder although hushed.

Adrian propped himself upright as the door opened, not fueled by anger but this time with hesitation, as if they were unsure what they would find.

Theo blinked skittishly, his pupils growing in the dark of the room, "Mate? Oh, thank *Merlin."*

Adrian tensed his jaw to withhold a yawn, "Theo? What do you-"

"The Headmaster wants you!" Theo blurted, shifting his weight anxiously, "He...Mate, something went bad."

Adrian's chest twitched as he stumbled to his feet, rapping his knuckles against Lutain's box to get the serpent alert and moving. He hurried and grabbed a robe, throwing it over his sleep clothes, "What happened?"

"I...I don't know...something with Professor Moody and...Adrian," Theo's body sagged, shaking in the light of the hallway, "Adrian, Cedric Diggory is dead."

Adrian stilled a second, hands freezing at the buttons of his cloak before they resumed fastening it closed.

Lutain slithered free, cold and slow as he glanced around, pausing and trying to come to an idea of his own.

"Why am I needed?" Adrian asked quietly, dread increasing rapidly, "I didn't *do* anything."

"*No!* No, nothing like that," Theo assured, easily seeing where Adrian's anxiety was stemming from.

"They need you for *something,* Headmaster's office. I…" Theo began rubbing his upper arm as his voice quieted, "I was worried that something happened to you, Dumbledore looked right angry. I'm...I'm glad you're okay."

Adrian gave a small nod, looking away from Theo as he gathered Lutain in the front pocket of his robe.

Adrian didn't know what Crouch had *done,* but he had a feeling it was only bad news.

He hurried out the steps, through the hallways. Nobody talked to him, the castle felt quiet and solemn like it had back in his second year. Mourning.

He remembered the Headmaster's office, already open to the staircase. Adrian dread pooling in his stomach, walked up the steps, Lutain twisted restless.

Adrian didn't even knock, he walked through the open door cautiously, glancing at the strangely decorated office tentatively.

"Mr. Selwyn," Dumbledore greeted, his voice deeper and without the welcoming warmth. It was

cold, not intentionally but rather through exhaustion.

What had Crouch *done.*

"Sir," Adrian acknowledged walking towards the high backed chairs. He assumed the discussion was going to take a while, he'd rather do it sitting.

"Potter?" Adrian mumbled, spotting the Triwizard Champion curled up on the velvet seat with one arm cradled carefully to his chest, "What...what happened, sir?"

"We need your recollection of this evening, Mr. Selwyn. It was our understanding you would be monitored by Professor Moody for the duration of the task."

Adrian nodded, sliding one hand into his pocket to stroke Lutain as a nervous tick, "I...I did, Sir. Go to him, at his office. He was...he was busy? He ah, he told me to go to my room, in the dungeons."

Dumbledore folded his hands together and peered at him through half moon spectacles, "And he left?"

Adrian nodded, "Yes, Sir."

Dumbledore looked at him, even as Adrian glanced around the office instead. The Phoenix was there, sitting on its roost above as it stared at Adrian.

It recoiled, looking as if it had smelled something foul.

Adrian carefully stroked Lutain, keeping him out of sight.

"Mr. Selwyn, Professor Moody was an imposter." Dumbledore informed him carefully, "It would ease our troubled minds, for you to visit the Hospital Wing for any malicious curses."

"Yes, Sir." Adrian nodded. Skylar didn't budge, still comatose on his chair.

"Then that will be all, Mr. Selwyn." Dumbledore smiled thinly, waving towards the door.

Adrian nodded, standing up to walk out.

"Your snake," Skylar muttered, voice hoarse as if he had been screaming, or crying, "It speaks English."

Adrian paused, "I...Lutain understands it, I think."

Skylar didn't say anything else. Neither did Dumbledore.

Adrian left.

Earlier.

Skylar felt his feet slam into the ground, his hand let go of the Triwizard Cup at last.

He groaned, lying prone for a few seconds before stirring, looking immediately for Cedric.

"Where are we?" Skylar asked.

Cedric shook his head. He got up, pulled Skylar to his feet and looked around, absentmindedly

brushing turf off his legs.

They had left Hogwarts grounds, no doubt. Skylar thought the Portkey had lasted a bit longer than usual. They had traveled far, perhaps hundreds of miles, for even the mountains surrounding the castle had vanished. They were standing instead in a dark and overgrown graveyard, desolate and empty except for the overgrown bushes and a large yew tree.

"Up there, a house." Cedric pointed, beginning to take the first steps towards the hill while mindful of the many graves. Skylar had heard horror stories of softened ground over caskets in the ground; of people falling through the turf like the corpses were trying to suck down anyone who walked across.

"Think this is still part of the tournament?" Skylar asked, side stepping to avoid an old rotten log on the ground, "I thought the cup was supposed to take us back to the start?"

Cedric looked at Skylar in surprise, "Someone told you that the Cup was a *Portkey?"*

Skylar shrugged, looking around nervous, "Wands out?"

"Yeah," Cedric agreed, he sounded just as nervous as Skylar was.

They walked through the darkness, nearing the hill and beginning to traverse its slow incline. Cedric shivered violently, shaking his head as he passed through something invisible.

"A ward! Who would put a ward up out here?" Cedric asked out loud, eyebrows high to his hairline. "I mean- that ward looks advanced."

"I don't like it," Skylar muttered, passing through it with no resistance. "Maybe a muggle repelling charm?"

Cedric snorted, "I think the graveyard and the house does that enough,"

Skylar managed a small laugh, one that was still filled with nervous energy. They walked, drawing closer and closer to the house.

The closer they got, the stranger it appeared to look. From the distance, it looked like a ruin, supported by broken beams and mossy rock. Up close, it seemed intact, pristine and in perfect condition. Even the *lawn* mysteriously became pruned and watered.

"Bit wonky, isn't it?" Cedric laughed, glancing at Skylar and trying not to look as scared as he felt, "Pureblood house out with muggles?"

Something struck Skylar, a niggling feeling that something wasn't right.

"Maybe...Maybe we should head back to the Cup," Skylar licked his lips, "Go back, send sparks that we got it."

Cedric looked like he considered the idea, before he looked back at the house.

"Think about it, maybe something's in there, something we're supposed to get." Cedric urged.

Skylar shifted on his feet, looking around in the fog, yet he couldn't see anything approaching. "Wands at ready?"

Cedric grinned, "Ready, mate. I got your back."

They pressed forward, pushing open a well oiled iron gate that separated the path to the front of the house.

The lawn was immaculate, yet entirely quiet. Not a single bird around.

There was a rattling *bang,* and the two boys jumped, pointing their wands at the source.

"What is *that?"* Cedric blurted, peering at the odd bird like creature. It hopped around, jerking its head like a rooster as it observed them with dim yellow eyes. A reptilian tail dragged along, parting strands of grass as it pecked at the soil.

"I have no idea," Skylar admitted, tilting his head as he observed the weird beast, "Maybe it's friendly?"

The chicken-lizard clicked its tongue and awkwardly scrambled away, between two artfully positioned boulders. Something translucent hung from the boulder's ridge.

"Cedric, take a look at this," Skylar called over, squatting as he gently pulled off what he thought was tissue paper, only to feel the slight patterning.

Cedric felt it, running his calloused fingertips over the thin paper, "That's skin, like from a lizard."

Skylar dropped it and looked around quickly, "It looks *big."*

"They wouldn't repeat dragons," Cedric assured him, although it sounded more like to sooth his own nerves.

"Wish I knew bloody magical creatures," Skylar anxiously laughed to himself, drawing a snort from Cedric.

"Yeah well, we aren't Selwyn." Cedric muttered under his breath, a fluidity to the expression.

The two held the wands slightly tighter.

A bird shrieked, a falcon cry that pierced the night. Skylar swallowed thickly, he cast lumos to have a little area to see.

"That window, looks like it might open." Cedric pointed, shifting into a slow jog as he neared it, "Might have a way inside-"

Skylar spotted the slightest hint of movement and screamed, "Cedric *no-"*

Something *lunged,* jumping through the air and tackling Cedric to the ground. Cedric screamed, thrashing as whatever monster it was, moved tighter and tighter.

Skylar thought at first it was a tentacle from the Giant Squid, as long as a house and looping over and over again. As he drew nearer and instantly fired off stunners, he realized that it was a snake.

A very, *very* large snake.

"Skylar! Help!" Cedric screamed, his voice piercing with horrifying fear as the large boy struggled against the beast.

It moved, uncoiling and undulating just enough for Skylar to understand that he had found its head. Large bulbous eyes on a triangular head, already its jaws were opening to unreal proportions with *gigantic* hooked teeth.

Skylar screamed a blasting curse at its face, unable to even hear himself over the pounding of his ears.

It recoiled and hit the ground with an angry hissing noise, already shifting and recovering as Cedric screamed out a spell that must have turned him slippery- that was the only way he could have practically *leapt* from the beast's coils.

It realized that they were free instantly, thrashing out with unnerving intelligence to try and knock out their legs. It didn't looked damaged from the blasting curse, it was magic repellent.

"Skylar!" Cedric shouted, warning him of the thick stocky tail trying to get him from behind.

The snake nightmare hissed, lifting itself upwards until it was equal to their eyes, and still had many, many feet to go before it ran out.

"Do we run?" Cedric whispered, looking more pale than a snowy owl.

The snake watched them carefully, looking far *far* too smart.

Skylar's breathing hilted as he *remembered,* Adrian Selwyn had a snake, a familiar. The long black one that was much less horrifying than the *behemoth* in front of him.

Adrian said that the snake knew English, that it was some sort of bond or other.

"Cedric," Skylar's voice wavered as absolute *terror* made his limbs numb, "Cedric, we *have* to get back to the Cup."

"But- Sky, the snake, what do we-"

The snake's mouth opened, a long broken hiss parted from its maw, pausing before beginning once more as if speaking.

As if *speaking.*

"Oh Merlin," Skylar whimpered, holding his wand with both hands as a surge of terror burst forward, "Cedric, we have to go *now."*

Cedric hesitated one second, then sent a shot of red light at the snake, turning and sprinting across the grass.

Skylar followed, his muscles screaming in protest as he forced himself to go *faster.*

He could hear the snake chasing them, the rough scales sliding over the pathway and the loud hisses it gave as it opened its jaws once more.

Through the mist in front of them, the air warped, then exploded upwards in bright red fire.

"Get back!" Skylar shouted, grabbing Cedric's arm and yanking backwards as the Fiendfyre morphed into the hungry maw of a wyvern, its searing teeth snapping shut just before them.

Cedric gasped, spinning his arms and collapsing as he tripped. Skylar fell as well, nearly landing on him.

The snake was getting closer, closing the distance with a hungry intent.

"Stay back!" Skylar shouted, pointing his wand at the snake before alternating it to the Fiendfyre,

trying to protect Cedric.

"That's enough, my dear." said a high, cold voice from beyond the fog.

A thin man emerged from the fog, staring at Skylar and Skylar stared back. Whiter than a skull, with wide, scarlet eyes, and a nose as flat as the snake's, with slits for nostrils…

"Oh Merlin," Cedric choked out, finally catching his breath back and he struggled over to see the approaching figure.

"Stay back!" Skylar screamed, entire body rattling like a leaf in the wind. He could feel terrified tears twist the corners of his mouth, cascading down his jawline as he held eye contact.

"Who are you?" Cedric shouted, tensing his jaw as he pointed his wand at the fire, still glaring at the new man.

The man slipped one unnaturally long-fingered hands into a deep pocket, withdrawing a wand. He handled it carefully, reverently yet with a confidence that suggested years of use.

The snake hissed something. The man hissed back to it.

Cedric's face paled until it was almost as white as the man's.

"Skylar Potter." Lord Voldemort spoke softly, his voice cutting through the air like a razor blade, "...we meet, at last."

"Sky, Sky who-" Cedric choked out, his entire body was taught as a rope.

Skylar shook his head, swallowing rapidly, "You're *dead,"* He protested, as if stating it would cause the man to vanish, "You're dead- *I killed you!"*

Voldemort tilted his head, his red eyes, whose pupils were slits, like a cat's, gleamed still more brightly through the darkness.

"You'll find," Voldemort began, words smooth and quiet yet saturated with power, "That I am very much *alive."*

Voldemort raised his wand, thin lips twisting into what could have once been a smile, "How kind, to bring me an offering."

Cedric's breath hitched.

A swishing noise, and the man screeched the words to the night: "*Avada Kedavra!"*

A blast of green light blazed through the air and illuminated the light. It hit, and Cedric rolled, stumbling down the hill through the fog. Skylar screamed, a single wordless sound of horror and fear.

Then, Skylar too rolled and sprinted down the hill.

He could hear the Fiendfyre snapping, slowly burning and imploding until it was nothing more than an ember. Skylar's breaths came laboured, his mouth dry and every sense on high alert as the mist obscured everything in the fog.

The Dark Lord looked surprised, as if he hadn't expected Skylar and Cedric to be there. There was a chance that he didn't know about the cup.

Skylar sprinted, his legs moving beyond his control as his momentum carried him further than he wanted. He tumbled, flipping head over heels, catching his weight on his left wrist which snapped under his weight like a twig.

Bright hot pain burned through him, yet he couldn't feel it through the adrenaline running through his system.

There was a loud *crack* in the air. Skylar's heart hammered as he peered around in the mist, squinting and breathing heavily.

Had Cedric gotten to the cup? Had he left with it already?

Was Skylar….trapped?

'The Boy Who Lived…' A voice trailed, something whispered gently as if right behind Skylar. It echoed, muted yet still jarring down to his bones.

Skylar couldn't help the helpless sound that slipped past his lips, his chest felt far too tight.

'Do you think you can hide from me?' It asked, bitingly cold.

Skylar *ran,* pushing his legs as he stepped in mud and nearly tripped over one nasty clump of heather.

'You cannot escape me, child.' The voice taunted, and Skylar clamped one hand over his ear, it didn't help.

'In the end, you will always die.'

Skylar ran, barely able to see through the tears.

He saw a figure emerge, tall and hunched and looking around calmly although on guard. Skylar recognized him instantly, and relief flooded through his body, "Professor Moody!"

The man spun, magical eye able to pierce the mist.

"Potter!" Moody grunted, leaning on his walking stick as he wielding his one wand into the mist carefully.

"Cup was a Portkey," Skylar said, swaying as everything slammed into him, "Took me and Cedric here….and….*Him,* Voldemort-" Skylar choked on the word, tears cascading as well from the fear and the pain, "...Lord Voldemort…"

Moody stared at him with a lopsided grimace, "The Dark Lord is here? Where?"

Skylar shook his head, swaying. He grabbed Moody's arm, tugging him pathetically through the mist in the direction of the graveyard, "We...We have to go, he's *here."*

They emerged, and Moody yanked his arm away, peering around once more with a grimace.

"Cedric," Skylar gasped, raising his hands to his mouth as he screamed, "*Cedric!"*

Moody frowned, "That boy is long dead, Potter."

"No," Skylar shook his head, his throat filled with cotton, "*No,* He..I just saw him-"

"The Dark Lord is here and you think that boy stands a chance?" Moody huffed what could have been a laugh, "He's dead."

"*No*! We...we have to save him!"

Moody sighed, as if the information was boring him, "You aren't getting out of here, Potter."

Skylar heard him, but didn't believe.

"No, no the Portkey..."

"Was one way," Moody said slowly, his magical eye swung into the fog, "It won't be taking you back."

Skylar felt numb. It had to be a bad joke.

'Do you truly believe, that you are special?'

Skylar gasped, shaking his head and pressing his hands hard into his ears, twisting until it *ached* and ground his broken wrist together.

"Do you hear him?" Moody demanded, rushing forward to grab Skylar's shoulders, "What does he say? Answer me!"

'How I have longed for your death, Skylar Potter.'

Skylar stumbled backwards, tumbling over the grass and tripping once his ankles kicked something laying on the ground.

For a second that contained an eternity, Skylar stared into Cedric's face, at his open grey eyes, blank and expressionless as the windows of a deserted house, at his half-open mouth, which looked slightly surprised. Before Skylar's mind had accepted what he was seeing, before he could feel anything but numb disbelief, he felt himself being pulled to his feet.

There was another crack, something loud and singular just out of sight.

"Unhand him,"

Skylar could have sobbed in relief.

Moody's lopsided grimace turned to a snarl, he pointed his wand at Dumbledore. The older man's eyes were not kind, even as they looked over Skylar.

"Skylar, are you alright?" He asked quietly.

Skylar nodded, stumbling away as Moody shoved him and drew his wand.

"Moody-" Skylar stumbled, still in a state of complete disbelief.

"This is not Alastor Moody," said Dumbledore quietly in the night, "You have never known Alastor Moody. The real Moody would not have argued my direct orders, and apparated beyond the wards. The moment he abandoned his position, I knew. I followed."

Moody snarled, "You're too late, if you think that this will stop *anything."*

"Sir," Skylar whimpered, "Voldemort, he's here-"

Dumbledore stilled, "Are you certain?"

Skylar swallowed, exhaling as he tried to compose himself, "as certain as I've ever been."

Dumbledore gave a small nod.

'How touching,'

Skylar whimpered and once more ground his wrist into his ear.

"Skylar?" Dumbledore asked, voice urgent, "Skylar, you must ignore him."

'If only you had found that boy in time, before I watched the life leave his eyes.'

"Cedric," Skylar choked out, before tears cascaded down his face.

Moody watched, holding a standoff between the two wizards.

Then, something strange happened.

Moody faltered, a full body flinch and a shift as if struck with a dizzying spell. He stumbled, just one step before Dumbledore's stunner sent him crashing to the floor.

Dumbledore paused a moment, before he lowered himself to the ground near Skylar.

"Skylar, I need you to be brave. You said you saw him?"

Skylar nodded, running one arm under his nose to stop the snot and wipe his tears, "He- he was *walking.* And- and the snake…"

Dumbledore looked deep in thought, "Nagini," he murmured under his breath.

He lifted his wand, spinning it in a circle. The mist swirled, and melted through the ground.

The house on the hill had vanished.

"The end, of another year."

Dumbledore paused, his eyes falling onto the Hufflepuff table. Theirs were the saddest and palest faces in the Hall.

"There is much that I would like to say to you all tonight," said Dumbledore, "but I must first acknowledge the loss of a very fine person, who should by all means be sitting here," he gestured towards the Hufflepuffs, "enjoying our Feast with us. I would like you all, please, to stand and raise your glasses to Cedric Diggory."

They did it, all of them; the benches and plates clattered as everyone in the Hall stood. Even the Slytherins stood, silent as statues.

"Cedric was a person who exemplified many of the qualities which distinguish Hufflepuff house. He was a good and loyal friend, a hard worker, he valued fair play. His death has affected you all. I think you have the right to know exactly how it came about."

Skylar raised his head, and stared at Dumbledore.

"Cedric Diggory was murdered by Lord Voldemort."

A panicked whisper swept through the Great Hall. People stared at Dumbledore in horror, and disbelief. Dumbledore remained calm, even as the whispers drew to a silence.

"The Ministry of Magic does not wish me to tell you this. It is possible that some of your parents will be horrified that I have done so - either because they will not believe that Lord Voldemort has returned, or because they think I should not tell you so, young as you are. It is my belief that the truth is generally preferable to lies. Any attempt to pretend that Cedric died as the result of an accident is an insult to his memory."

Lutain shifted, resting his head over Adrian's hand. All eyes were on Dumbledore, captivated.

"There is somebody else who must be mentioned in connection to Cedric's death. I am talking, about Skylar Potter."

A ripple crossed the Great Hall. Heads turning quickly to spot the student before locking on Dumbledore.

"Skylar Potter managed to escape Lord Voldemort, he risked his own life in attempts to save Cedric. He has shown in every respect the bravery that few wizards have ever shown in facing Lord Voldemort and for this, I honour him."

Dumbledore turned gravely to Skylar and raised his goblet once more. Nearly everyone in the Great Hall followed suit. Adrian did not.

When everyone returned sitting, Dumbledore continued.

"It is my belief, and never have I so hoped that I am mistaken, that we are all facing dark and difficult times. Some worse than others. Some of you, in this very Hall, have already suffered directly at the hands of Lord Voldemort. Some of you bear the memories of struggles, some of you bear the wounds and scars for everyone to see."

Greengrass turned, staring at Adrian with a somber expression.

"A week ago, a student was taken from our midst. Remember Cedric. Remember, if the time should come when you have to make a choice between what is right, and what is easy, remember what happened to a boy who was good, and kind, and brave, because he strayed across the path of Lord Voldemort. Remember Cedric Diggory."

"Things will not be easy, will they?" Lutain asked quietly.

Adrian stroked his back, over the ridge of his spine and down his flank.

Something in Adrian's stomach gurgled angrily, twisting and jabbing him like a knife.

He glanced to his left; across the distance of the Great Hall his eyes caught and latched onto Skylar Potter.

Skylar picked up his goblet, holding it aloft in a silent toast.

Adrian lifted his with a nod.

They exchanged toast built on no words; and for the first time, the two boys needed none.

End of Part 1

Order

Chapter Summary

Adrian hates confinement, stabs someone, and Skylar just wants information.

Chapter Notes

This is the start of Part 2, which will be much much shorter than the first part.

It's strange. It's like there is a small gap, a pause between my brain and body. A second where I don't move, although I'm stepping forward. I'm treading through water that nobody can see.'

Albus Dumbledore was a very tired man.

It felt to him, that no matter how many times he sat down and resolved problems, smaller peskier ones simply leapt upwards to take their places. He had soothed squabbles between papers, a few Wizengamot meetings, conferences with the Minister of Magic, discussions with the Britain Committee of Magical Education, and even visited a few homes of struggling muggleborns. No matter how much he did, there would *always* be more to take its place.

With the spectacular disaster of the Triwizard Tournament, his workload had only since increased. A mixture of pleas and threats arrived by post daily, each sorted with a nifty charm to determine if information was useful.

And yet, despite his precautions over the years, here he was, forced to call together once more the Order of the Phoenix.

Fawkes trilled sadly, his long tail feathers softly brushing against the floor as his familiar perched on the back of his chair.

"I know," Albus sighed, wistfully stroking the crown above Fawkes' brow with one weathered finger, "Dark times are coming, my friend."

Fawkes ducked his head, as if mourning.

The door on the other side of the room opened jerkily, Molly scrambled inside with the chaotic frenzy that she wielded like a sword. "Oh! Albus! Would you like some tea? The others are just arriving! And I'll send little Sky on up with his friends, they can work on cleaning the third floor!" She tittered, scrubbing her fingers into her apron.

Albus found himself smiling at the energetic youth she still displayed, "That would be wonderful, Molly. Perhaps one of those honey cakes as well?"

"Oh! Of course!" She assured, her face tightening into a firm expression, "I'll leave you a plate, and they best be gone before the meeting starts!"

Albus chuckled lightly, humoring her with a small nod. She scampered off, already calling after the Weasley Twins, likely hiding in the stairwell.

Albus folded his hands, running his thumbs over his knucklebones while deep in thought. He barely noticed as Molly returned, delivering him a heaping pile of honey cakes, and a saucer of tea that had spilled slightly on the one side.

Fawkes chirped, and Dumbledore affectionately gave the crisp crust to the large bird.

The door opened once again, and the stilted strides of one of his closest friends staggered through.

"Alastor," Albus greeted fondly, "You look as if something has troubled you?"

Alastor scoffed, heavily settling into the nearest chair, "You can say that again, Albus. That last lead? With the Kimborns? Dead, as dried out as Potter's liquor cabinet."

Albus smiled knowingly, "Skylar is a young boy, it was my advice he empty out that cabinet. Merlin knows I'd have done that at his age."

Moody snorted, "You're spoiling that brat. Give him Dragon Barrel Brandy, see if he ever goes near a cabinet again!"

Albus chuckled fondly as Moody gave a hoarse laugh, grimacing as his magical eye noticeably stuck in its harness. Without asking, he unhooked the magical eye, and plopped it into Albus' tea.

Moody had a slight self satisfied grin, as if he knew all along that he would do that.

"I saw the others stumbling in, any news from Severus?"

Albus nodded slightly, "As much as he could disclose. He will be attending of course, before leaving once more."

Moody grimaced, "Merlin knows what he's doing. Never been that fond of spies, myself."

Albus obeyed Molly's orders and finished the honey cakes, although he was mindful of the tea. The others arrived, a low murmuring buzz through the wall which quickly distorted as they shuffled in, exchanging grins or grimaces.

"Albus," Remus nods, sliding in last and taking the seat closest to the door.

Remus' eyes were dark, the bags under them looked more sickly than before. It almost looked as if the moon was nearing its peak, yet Albus knew it was still a week away.

Moody subtly nudged him, drawing his attention to the other man.

"It's that boy," Moody grumbled low under his breath, only heard by Tonks who was sitting right next. She had enough politeness to not comment, or at least pretend to ignore.

Albus sighed quietly through his nose. He felt horrible for that poor child, the one Remus had taken a liking to so fondly, and yet… the boy seemed sickly. He wondered if their help was unable to truly combat whatever damage Bellatrix Lestrange had inflicted.

Perhaps it should be better to convince Remus to leave him in more qualified hands, yet he knew the other man would protest vehemently.

"We're all here, Albus." Arthur Weasley nervously started, sitting at the table quietly.

"We are," Albus agreed, waving his wand to gently close the door and activate the silencing wards. With those Weasley twins, he knew they'd be trying all they could to listen in.

"Shall we start with stating our basic information?" He offered, looking at Moody who seemed ready to take the wheel.

"Alright," Moody grumbled rising and slamming one hand on the table loudly, "So we know You-Know-Who is back and we've got no bloody idea where he's holed up. We've checked every graveyard and nearby castles or manors from here to Cardiff, and nothing."

"Also checked some of the names Skylar pulled off the stones!" Tonks excitedly threw in, "Still nothing, but we checked."

"Which means, that bastard probably wiped the entire area out, a few miles worth of spellwork."

"Couldn't we detect that large of a ward?" Bill Weasley asked gently, working as a Curse Breaker and now more than ever, ready to join the Order.

"If it was any other wizard, you sure could. The Dark Lord? He'd have you strung up by your thumbs spitting out your entrails before you got close."

James Potter huffed something that could be a laugh, tiredly rubbing his eyes, "What about...the ah, the old Death Eaters we brought in that got off? Anyone tailing them?"

"Already tried that," Moody grimaced, "They haven't been seen coming or going."

"What about Bellatrix the Bitch?" Sirius asked, his voice dark and sing song as he stared at a wall, "You all check out the Lestrange and Black houses?"

Albus smiled sadly, "Everything has been untouched."

Remus flinched slightly and glared with something dark in his eyes.

"At this point," Moody grumbled loudly, "I'd say we're looking for a galleon in Merlin's Arse."

"Alastor!" Lily Potter protested at the words.

"What! It's true! We have nothing to run on but shite!"

Sirius worried his lip, rubbing his face tiredly, "Alright, so, what...what if we just follow all of the older Death Eaters. Old Luci has got to be doing something-"

"Best cease your rambling, mutt." Snape drawled out, voice sharp as he watched Sirius freeze and glare.

"Oi, off his back Sniv-" James started, only for Lily to pull on his arm and shake her head.

"What about you? You go crawling back to your *master?"* Sirius sneered, hands clenching into fists.

Oh dear.

Albus stood, demanding attention by nature. He smiled and shook his head gently, "Sirius, Severus is a close friend and he has not betrayed the Order. He plays a very important role in all of this…"

"He's a spy!" Sirius complained pointedly.

"Sometimes I am too!" Tonks protested, pouting and crossing her arms, "That mean you don't like me?"

"No no, I love you Tonks," Sirius confessed, looking rather annoyed with the situation, "I'm just...I'm just a bit tired is all."

Remus huffed a small laugh, but didn't say anything.

"Speaking of tired, you look rather rubbish, Lupin." Moody grunted, craning his one human eye to peer at the werewolf, "Moon's not until a week now."

"Er, no." Remus blinked, looking surprised but not at all defensive, "No, I haven't been sleeping well is all. It's nothing."

Sirius frowned, looking at the table as he muttered out, "It's because of that rabid kid, Moony."

Remus shot him a look.

"He's right, Remus." Lily quietly spoke. Her own admittance seemed to make everyone in the room freeze.

Except Remus.

"No, no Adrian is just struggling." Remus defended, shifting his jaw the slightest amount, "He's doing alright."

"Moony, I've practically sworn the kids to staying out of your rooms, I even got the Twins to agree to it." James sighed, removing his glasses and cleaning them on his robe, "Mate, I think he needs different help."

Remus' nostrils flared, "Adrian is doing *fine."*

"He's not, I saw him attack the portrait of my mother the other day with a butter knife. Not that I'm complaining, but that's not normal, Moony." Sirius pointed out.

"He…" Tonks looked unsure, her eyes glazing over as if she was about to cry, "I heard him talking to nobody, Mr. Lupin. Just walking around talking to nobody."

"He was talking to his familiar!" Remus snapped out, hands curling into fists, "I'm not abandoning him, and that's final."

"Remus," Albus spoke softly, smiling gently at the werewolf. "I do not mean for you to feel threatened. I've had Madam Pomfrey check him at Hogwarts before the year ended, perhaps it would be possible to arrange something again? He is rather secretive."

Snape's lip twitched and he huffed quietly, "The brat gets in more fights and is almost as attention seeking as *Potter's."*

"Say that to my face, Snivellus," James growled, drawing his wand, "And I'll make you puke slugs."

"*Remus,"* Albus asked, his voice silencing the argument that was starting to brew.

Remus twitched unsure, "He...he's told me that he doesn't want to see any sort of Mediwitch, or Madam Pomfrey unless he has to. He says that he...he knows healing spells, Albus. He's rather good at them too, from what I've seen at Hogwarts."

Lily's hand drifted to her mouth in horror,

"I can make the boy squeal." Moody offered, causing Remus to shake his head quickly.

"No, no I...he's unlike anything you've ever seen, Alastor. He laughs at it, I think perhaps the cursed scar has damaged him beyond help, Albus."

Albus inhaled, and exhaled slowly, "It's alright, Remus. May I talk with the boy?"

Remus worried his lip, "He...he doesn't want to talk with you. He smells sick, Albus. He smells like something's rotting but he doesn't have any wounds."

Snape shifted, "I can provide a healing remedy for you to dose him with, if you believe he is idiotically hiding an injury."

Remus looked *exhausted,* "He already has a supply of potions from Madam Pomfrey, although if you're willing to spare one or two, I'm sure he'll see reason."

James stepped forward sharply, "The kid was raised by Bellatrix, right? Why doesn't he just tell us where he was living?"

Sirius rubbed his face, "because we've already *checked* all of the places, Mate."

James' brow furrowed, "Well, yeah, but we haven't found the right one."

"Oh cease your idiocy, or I may catch it," Snape mumbled under his breath.

Alastor stood sharply, tilting his head in thought, "You're *right.* Albus, those houses for the Lestrange's, none of them had anything for a kid, right?"

Albus thought quickly, he wasn't sure although he hadn't visited all of the houses himself, "I am not sure, although I will gather my thoughts on it."

"I'll go search again!" Tonks volunteered enthusiastically, "I can sneak in and out easy!"

"Be safe, dear," Molly fretted, "I know how clumsy you can be when you're distracted."

Tonks flushed bright red, traveling all the way up to the roots of her hair before traveling along the root and staining her hair cardamon.

"Remus, perhaps I can still speak to the boy? He may confess something to me which will help us greatly." Albus offered gently.

Snape scoffed, "As if. His mind is clouded and any sort of occlumency barrier is pathetically dismal, he likely has tried to forget everything of use."

Remus looked thoughtful, "Back...back when I first met him, when I was teaching. He told me that he could help, or that he had information we could use."

The room grew silent.

"Like what?" Arthur Weasley breathed dreadfully.

Alastor's lip twitched into a lopsided grin, "For starters, he may know where Bellatrix likes to hide."

Adrian lay on his bed, his eyes closed and hands loosely interlocked over his stomach.

Lutain was sleeping, over near the window where Hedwig preened her feathers near the window frame.

It was calm, relaxing, and Adrian hadn't ever felt so tense.

'Why so tense?' He thought to himself, rhythmically flexing his fingers into a fist before relaxing them once more.

There was a clock in his room, the steady ticking was grounding.

He heard a low grumbling, the shift of furniture across hardwood flooring. So what Remus had said earlier *was* true. He wondered if the Potters were going to show, or stay in one of the many well hidden houses they had.

Adrian righted himself, wincing as his knees throbbed faintly. He slid to the floor, socks scuffing over the polished wood as he walked towards his bedroom door.

The hallway was silent, isolated from the other rooms mostly for Adrian's sake. Remus too, liked isolation on occasion. Being around so many people likely made him nervous.

Adrian made his way to the main stairwell, peering over the banister curiously.

"What are you doing?" Adrian asked dryly, arching his eyebrows at the large group of people leaning over the railing with flesh coloured strings attached to their ears.

They jumped, both twins perking up and grinning at Adrian. "He awakens!"

Adrian huffed, and observed the newest addition to the group.

Skylar looked surprised, "You're here too?"

Adrian's lip curled in annoyance, "I didn't have a choice."

Skylar paused, then flushed in embarrassment when he realized that Adrian truly didn't.

"Hi Adrian!" Hermione beamed, waving friendly as Ron just shifted uncomfortably, "I haven't seen you today!"

Adrian stared. Hermione visibly wilted.

"Uh-oh," Fred mumbled, yanking upwards on the string and apparating instantly alongside George with a loud crack. They appeared only halfway up the stairs, directly between the group and Adrian.

Mrs. Weasley appeared at the very bottom of the stairs. "The meeting's over, you can come down and have dinner now. Everyone is dying to see you, Skylar! Oh! Adrian! You're welcome to join us!"

Adrian leant on the banister and sighed heavily.

"Now, don't forget to keep your voices down in the hall…"

'I should set Lutain on the portrait, maybe he'll get the horrid thing to stop screaming.'

The meeting filed out, filling the hallway below. Almost on cue, the twins lowered another one of the flesh colored strings, trying to hear a word. A moment later however, the mass below began to move toward the front door and out of sight.

The golden trio hurried down the stairs, keeping quiet. The twins paused on the stairwell near Adrian, offering their arms politely.

"Any chance I can just sneak back to my room?" Adrian asked rhetorically.

"None!" George chirped, "Mum would bloody kill us for letting you starve."

"And Kreacher would poison the leftovers before he gave you any!" Fred cheerfully added.

Adrian looped his arms through the provided elbows, and descended the steps with the older boys.

They were nearly to the bottom of the stairs when there was a loud crash.

Then, the most horrid earsplitting screech.

Fred and George groaned, Adrian mentally cursed Tonks.

"Filth! Scum! By-products of dirt and vileness! Half-breeds, mutants, freaks begone from this place! How dare you befoul the house of my fathers-"

Adrian tensed, his jaw clenching and his molars ground together. He *hated* that portrait.

He stomped down the steps, past the scandalized Skylar and directly towards the hideous portrait. Remus and Mrs. Weasley were battling with the velvet moth eaten curtains, trying to drag them shut.

"Shut *up!"* Adrian hissed, drawing back his leg and kicking with dragonhide boots into the spelled canvas. He knew it wouldn't hurt her, although the rattling *bang* of his foot smacking into her painted stomach was enough to have her gasp and recoil. With stupendous effort, Remus and Mrs. Weasley yanked the curtains closed again. The screeches died and an echoing silence fell.

Sirius Black ran out from a nearby room, looking guiltily at the painting while also having the smallest smear of chocolate icing on one cheek, "Shite, Moony you got her-"

"Yeah, all good." Remus smiled, looking as if the shrieking had busted one of his eardrums.

"What…" Skylar trailed off, still looking dazed.

"My mum," Sirius offered with a wince, "We've been trying to get her down for a month but we think she put a Permanent Sticking Charm on the back. Nothing hurts her, spells or curses or Adrian here going at her with a butter knife a week ago. Scared her right but didn't do anything." Sirius huffed, pausing and looking at Adrian with gratitude, "thanks anyways."

Adrian gave a small nod back.

"What's a portrait of your mother doing here?" Skylar asked, bewildered as they went through the door from the hall that led the way down a flight of narrow stone steps, the others just behind them.

"Hasn't anyone told you? This was my parents' house, but I'm the last Black left, so it's mine now. I offered it to Dumbledore."

Remus shuffled behind Adrian, keeping a protective lookout on his back. They reached the bottom of the stairs, heading through a door leading into the basement kitchen.

It was scarcely less gloomy than the hall above; a cavernous room with rough stone walls. Most of the light was coming from a large fire at the far end of the room. A haze of pipe smoke hung in the air like battle fumes. A long table had been littered with rolls of parchment, goblets, empty wine bottles, and heaps of rags. A large amount of the chairs had been removed to be placed in the meeting room upstairs, although a large collection did remain scattered around the table.

"Skylar!" Mr. Weasley shouted in surprise, hurrying over when he finally saw Skylar.

"Have you met Mundungus?" Sirius asked Skylar, pointing to one short man passed out and drooling over the kitchen table.

Adrian snorted sourly, the sound was harsh enough to jolt the man awake

"Eh?" Mundungus asked, peering around and brightening up when he spotted Skylar, "Skylar Potter! A pleasure!"

"Don't shake his hand, it's coated in grime." Adrian advised lowly, skirting past Skylar towards the kitchen area.

"Oi! You have a bone to pick with me, brat?" Mundungus growled, standing up and revealing his very unimpressive height.

Adrian curled his lip, "As many as in my body."

Mundungus cursed, fumbling in his oversized pockets to grab his wand. Adrian snorted loudly, and rudely before turning away.

"Uh…" Skylar smartly added.

"Ignore them," Sirius muttered, thinking that Adrian likely couldn't hear, "We think it's a rivalry thing. Mundungus is a ah...a merchant, business with a few people we want to know about."

Skylar blinked in surprise, "But…"

Adrian pointedly grabbed a potato from a basket, and began scrubbing it vigorously under a running tap.

Lupin leaned inwards, pitching his voice low enough Adrian actually *couldn't* hear, "Adrian's been having some trouble. We think that with You-Know-Who returning, the increase of dark magic has been irritating his scar more. He's been...a bit more aggressive. Be patient with him."

Skylar nodded silently, although looked still confused.

"Can I help?" Tonks asked energetically, hurrying over towards a dresser from where she collected cutlery.

Soon, a series of heavy knives were chopping meat and vegetables on their own, while Adrian quickly washed them by hand (magic never quite cleaned them, according to Mrs. Weasley).

Then Fred and George appeared, brandishing wands and magically levitating a pot of stew, a flagon of butterbeer, and a heavy wooden breadboard and a knife through the air.

The occupants of the table leapt away as Mrs. Weasley began shrieking. Adrian felt his mouth

twitch upwards as the knife pinwheeled three times before stabbing into the table.

Skylar and Sirius were both laughing. Mundungus was swearing as he stumbled to his feet- Adrian casually tripped the man once more and sent him to the ground.

"Boys," Mr. Weasley said, lifting the stew towards its proper place in the middle of the table, "You're supposed to show a sense of responsibility now that you've come of age-"

Someone entered the room, giving a loud laugh at the statement. "Nonsense boys! Enjoy it, just be a bit safer, eh?"

James Potter patted each of the twins on their shoulders, skirting around to take a seat nearest Sirius while Lily sat on his other side. Mr. Weasley gave a small huff of annoyance, yet seemed alright with the intrusion. Merlin knew that after years of scolding the boys, James tended to break through a little better, likely due to to the infamous prank stories. The twins beamed, giving quick nods as they accepted James' words without second thought. Ah, the age of teenage rebellion.

"Hello, Adrian," Lily Potter smiled gently, shifting the conversation around, "Would you like a Butterbeer?"

Adrian shook his head, ignoring her in favor of pouring himself a large bowl of stew with a ladle.

For a few minutes there was silence but for the chink of plates and cutlery and the scraping of chairs as everyone settled down to their food. Then Mrs. Weasley turned to Sirius and said, "I've been meaning to tell you, there's something trapped in the writing desk in the drawing room, it keeps rattling and shaking. Of course, it could just be a boggart, but I thought we ought to ask Alastor to have a look at it."

"Oh, we can take a look at it, Molly." Sirius assured, "Trained Aurors here, I'll take Moony if it could be anything else."

"Take Adrian! He's a magical creature expert!" Skylar added.

Mundungus sniggered into a speared carrot. Adrian kicked him under the table.

"Take Sky, it'll give him a chance to practice his Patronus." Lily included thoughtfully, glaring at Sirius sharply, "Under *supervision."*

"Of course," Sirius blinked rapidly, "they'll be safe in my hands."

The dinner time discussion evolved. James, Sirius, and Remus were all chatting with the Twins, regaling the two with various stories. Lily and Hermione were energetically watching Tonks as she transformed her face between mouthfuls into strange shapes, alternating between a pig snout or a button nose. Ron and Skylar were practically rolling in their seats as they listened to Mundungus explain one lucrative story, tears cascading down his cheeks. Adrian only interjected snidely when he could, leaving Mundungus verbalizing just how lucky he was that he wasn't allowed to hex him. Mrs. Weasley glared at Mundungus often, before she rose to her feet to fetch a large rhubarb crumble for pudding. Skylar looked at Sirius curiously.

"Molly doesn't approve of Mundungus," said Sirius in an undertone.

"Nobody does," Adrian sniped.

"How come he's in the Order?" Skylar asked, very quietly.

"He's useful," James muttered. "Knows all the crooks- well, he would, seeing as he's one himself. But he's also very loyal to Dumbledore, who helped him out in a tight spot once. It pays to have someone like Dung around, he hears things others don't. But Molly thinks inviting him to stay for dinner is going too far."

"He's also gotten into a few spats with Adrian there, as far as we know Adrian doesn't like Mundungus' ways of business but you know how those shady deals of his turned out."

Three helpings of rhubarb crumble and custard later, as well as the three bowls of stew just before, Adrian was by far demolishing everything set in front of him. Skylar slid him small tarts, watching out of fascination as the boy didn't slow down in the slightest.

"You alright, dear?" Lily asked concerned, bracing her chin with one hand. Adrian paused, glancing around the table with his usual level of paranoia.

"Hah! Keep going, maybe we'll be lucky and you'll pop," Mundungus sniggered, sliding over his half eaten bowl of stew, "You sure you didn't bite him, Lupin?"

The atmosphere chilled instantly.

Adrian set down his spoon before snatching up one of the small silver knives set beside his platter. It was speckled with grease from the large bits of meat in the stew, yet that didn't stop Adrian from flipping it and slamming it downwards into Mundungus' outstretched hand.

Dungus yowled, rocking upwards and tripping over Crookshanks in one fell swoop.

James jumped up, grabbing the man as Tonks herself scrambled upwards to grab Adrian's chair and drag him away. Adrian sat still, watching bemused from his seating position as Mundungus rolled on the floor yowling, clutching his right hand to his chest.

"Adrian!" Tonks yelped, spinning herself to stand between the table and Adrian, "That was, er...don't-"

"Adrian Selwyn!" Mrs. Weasley shrieked, relieving Tonks of her duty. She flushed angrily, hands landing on his shoulders as she roughly manhandled him up and towards the exit, "That is *not* proper behaviour- you are *not* allowed to act in such a way!"

Skylar and Ron looked dumbfounded, glancing at Adrian. The boy in question looked bemused.

Remus sighed through his nose, rubbing the bridge of it tiredly.

"Don't worry, mate," James assured, guiding the sniveling Mundungus out of the room as well, "Lily, if you will…?"

"Oh! Yes!" She leapt upwards, kindly relieving Mrs. Weasley of the younger troublemaker, "How about I take you back up to your room to get you freshened up for bed?"

Adrian looked unhappy, "I'm not a child."

Nonetheless, she gently steered him out, leaving behind an uncomfortable atmosphere.

"Well, nearly time for bed, I think," Mrs. Weasley awkwardly added, forcing a yawn.

"Not just yet, Molly," said Sirius, "I didn't want to say this infront of James, but I guess now is better than later. I'm surprised at you. I thought the first thing you'd do when you got here would

be to start asking questions about Voldemort."

The atmosphere in the room changed with the rapidity Skylar associated with dementors. Where seconds before it had been tensed, even forced relaxed, it was now uncomfortable. A frisson of fear had gone around the table at the mention of Voldemort. Lupin, who had been drinking a generous portion of his wine in light of recent events, lowered his goblet with an exhaustedly wary expression.

"I did!" said Skylar indignantly, "I asked Ron and Hermione but they said we're not allowed in the Order, so-"

"And they're quite right. You're all too young." said Mrs. Weasley.

Remus snorted sourly, as if that was horribly ironic.

"Since when did someone have to be in the Order of the Phoenix to ask questions?" Sirius asked bitterly, "Skylar's been trapped with James and Lily for months now. As much as I love them, Skylar's got the right to know what's been happen-"

"Hang on!" George interrupted loudly.

"How come Skylar gets *his* questions answered?" said Fred angrily.

"We've been trying to get stuff out of you for a month and you haven't told us a single stinking thing!"

"You're too young, you're not in the Order." Fred in a high-pitched voice, "You aren't even telling us about Selwyn and *we're* the ones who see him the most!"

"It's not my fault you haven't been told what the Order's been doing, that's Molly's decision. Information about Adrian is up to Remus. Skylar on the other hand-"

"It's not down to you to decide what's good for Skylar!" Mrs. Weasley sharply stated. Her normally kindly face looked dangerous. "You haven't forgotten what Dumbledore said!"

Sirius shifted, as if in preparation for a fight, "Which bit?"

"The bit about not telling Skylar more than he needs to know."

Ron, Hermione, Fred, and George's head turned from Sirius to Mrs. Weasley as though following an intense tennis rally. Skylar was watching the conversation with his mouth slightly open. Lupin's eyes were fixed on Sirius.

"I don't intend to tell him more than he needs to know, Molly," said Sirius. "But *he* was the one who saw Voldemort come back, and he has more right than most to-"

"He's not a member of the Order of the Phoenix! He's only fifteen and-"

"-and he's dealt with as much as most in the Order! And more than some-"

"No one's denying what he's done! But he's still-"

"He's not a child!"

"He's not an adult either!"

"Molly, *he's* the one who has fought Death Eater's face to face!"

"By that logic, you're saying *Adrian* should be in the Order too!"

Remus' body shifted, just enough to draw attention from all of those watching. "Remus?" Tonks asked quietly, worrying her bottom lip as her hair shifted to a sollum blue.

Remus rubbed his eye socket with one hand. Skylar noticed for the first time just how tired the other man looked. "Personally, I think it's better that Skylar gets the facts- not all the facts, Molly, but the general picture from us, rather than a garbled version from...others."

His expression was mild, but Skylar felt sure that Lupin, at least, knew that some Extendable Ears had survived the Weasley purge.

"Have you been telling Adrian then?" She snapped out quickly.

"I have," Remus said calmly, "as I feel he is justified in knowing information pertinent to himself."

"Well," said Mrs. Weasley, breathing deeply and looking around the table for support that did not come, "well...I can see I'm going to be overruled. I'll just say this: Dumbledore must have had his reasons for not wanting Skylar to know much, and speaking as someone who has got Skylar *and* Adrian's best interests at heart-"

"Adrian isn't under your care." said Sirius quietly.

"He's as good as," said Mrs. Weasley fiercely, "Who else has he got?"

"He's got me." Remus protested with a frown.

"Yes," said Mrs. Weasley, her lip curling in displaced aggression, "the thing is, it's rather difficult for you to look after him while you're ill four days every month, isn't it?"

Remus started to rise from his chair with a blank expression.

"Molly, you're not the only person at this table who cares about Adrian," said Sirius sharply, "Remus, sit down."

Mrs. Weasley's lower lip was trembling. Remus sank slowly back into his chair, face white.

"Very well," said Mrs. Weasley, her voice cracking, "Ron, Hermione, Fred, George- I want you out of this kitchen, now."

There was uproar, and Skylar shook his head with a small sigh, "I'll just tell them anyways."

"Fine!" shouted Mrs. Weasley, "But I want *no* part in this!"

She then stormed out, slamming the door behind her.

There was a pause, "James is going to kill me. Bollocks, alright Sky...what do you want to know?"

Locket

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian has chores, tries to poke a Boggart, and gets a little high.

I have potions. I'm not sure why. They go down cold, and I can feel them sit heavy. Remus says that he can smell something wrong with me. Nobody else seems to be sure, or they can't tell. I'm starting to think that he's right.

"Where's Voldemort? What's he doing? I've been trying to read the Prophet but I think Mum and Dad monitor it. There haven't been anything that looks like him yet, no funny deaths or anything-"

"That's because there haven't been any suspicious deaths yet," said Sirius, "not as far as we know anyway...and we know quite a lot."

"More than he thinks we do anyway," said Lupin.

"How come he's stopped killing people?" Skylar asked quietly.

"Because he doesn't want to draw attention to himself at the moment. It would be dangerous for him. His comeback didn't come off quite the way he wanted it to, he messed it up." Sirius sounded slightly smug.

"Or rather, you messed it up for him," said Lupin with a satisfied smile.

"How?" Skylar asked, perplexed.

"You weren't supposed to survive!" Sirius almost shouted, "Nobody apart from his Death Eaters were supposed to know, but the Triwizard fiasco and Moody's imposter made it so you're a witness. And the very last person he wanted to know about his return was Dumbledore, and you made sure Dumbledore knew the moment he returned."

"Has it helped?" Skylar asked quietly, shrinking in on himself.

"Thanks to you, Dumbledore was able to recall the Order of the Phoenix about an hour after you saw Voldemort. It's been tricky to get a few of us rounded up, especially with no solid proof, but we've been getting there."

"What have you been doing?"

"Trying to find that graveyard of yours," Tonks chimed in, "We've figured that you really shot his plan to hell since nobody can find the place. He hid the entire area because he's on the run now. Dumbledore's got an idea where it is, and Dumbledore's ideas generally turn out to be right."

"He hid the *entire place?"* Skylar gaped, "Okay, so what does Dumbledore reckon he's doing then?"

"Well," Sirius started, leaning onto the table heavily, "Firstly, he wants to build up his army again.

In the old days, he had huge numbers at his command; witches and wizards he'd bullied or bewitched into following him, his faithful Death Eaters, a great bunch of Dark creatures. You didn't see any other Death Eaters, and that Barty Crouch didn't know about his return which means he's only got a handful right now. He's certainly not going to try and take on the Ministry of Magic with only a dozen or so followers."

"So you're trying to stop him getting more followers?"

"We're doing our best, right now most people don't think he's actually back. We're also checking out some of the old haunts, Lestrange, Yaxley, Carrow, seeing any of the known houses or estates to try and find out where he's hiding. Selwyn actually mentioned a few houses we didn't know about, so I guess he's helped."

"Have you been checking the Ministry records?" Skylar asked, amazed and slightly impressed by the speed of everything.

"Well," Sirius trailed off, "*I* tried, got down into the records before some bloody toad of a woman caught me. Couldn't very well say I was with Dumbledore, though she knew who I was already. Doesn't matter, now I'm a full time Order member!"

Skylar's gaped in horror, "You were *fired?"*

Sirius gave a wink, "Between us, Sky, the Ministry sucked arse. I'm proud to help out Dumbledore any day, much better than that moron Fudge."

Skylar swallowed guiltily, "I'm sor-"

"None of that," Sirius firmly interjected, "Don't worry about it, mate. Tonks and Arthur are still in the Ministry, so we have a few spies in there."

"We've got a few spies spread out," Remus added helpfully, "Mundungus is keeping his eyes out in Knockturn, he's already spotted a few known Death Eaters and recorded their locations. Snape is helping- and I know how you feel about Snape but he *is* helping."

"It's a shame, I'd happily curse him." Sirius sighed wistfully.

"But we have Kingsley Shacklebolt's support, he's been a real asset too. He's in charge of the hunt for a few Dark Wizards from the last war, or those still running. Not all of them went to Azkaban, some just dropped off the map but are poking their heads back out. Kingsley's been chasing Greyback for the ministry for years."

"Is that why Adrian's helping? He's a spy in Slytherin?" Skylar interrupted hopefully.

Remus shifted uncomfortably, "He...his position is a bit difficult."

"From what we've gathered from Snivellus, Selwyn isn't the sweetest Pumpkin tart. He's said that Selwyn isn't the brightest, and gets into a dozen brawls or spats with his roommates weekly. Spends more time sleeping than going to classes and-"

"And is *sick."* Remus sharply bit out, his voice edging the slightest tone of a snarl, "with the increase of Dark Magic."

Sylar blinked in confusion, "He's sick? When did he become sick?"

Remus sighed and rubbed his temples, "I don't know. Around the time of your third task, although

it may have been dormant."

"This is what we like to call, Mama Wolf," Sirius cheerfully interjected, "Poppy's cleared him before and no scans are picking anything up. He seems fine, if only a bit moody. Likely since my bitch of a cousin is on the run and we *both* want her dead, but we're thinking Selwyn could be our very own Bellatrix hunter."

"*No,* we *aren't* thinking that." Remus sniped out coldly.

"What's Voldemort after apart from followers?" Skylar asked, diverting the conversation from something that could be tense.

Sirius and Lupin exchanged the most fleeting of looks before Sirius slowly added, "Stuff he can only get by stealth."

Skylar blinked, confused.

"Like a weapon. Something he didn't have last time."

"When he was powerful before? The last war?"

"Yes."

"What kind of weapon? Something worse than the Avada Kedav-"

"That's enough," Mrs. Weasley spoke from the shadows beside the door. Skylar hadn't noticed her return, her arms were crossed and she looked furious.

"I want all of you in bed, now. All of you," She added, looking at all of the younger students in the room.

"You've given Skylar plenty of information, any more and you might as well induct him into the Order."

"Why not?" Skylar asked quickly, "I'll join, I want to join. I want to fight-"

"No."

It wasn't Mrs. Weasley, it was Lupin.

"The Order is comprised only of over-age wizards. Wizards who have left school. There are dangers involved, of which you can have no idea."

Skylar's hand clenched and in a sudden fit of anger he blurted, "I think I have some idea, Moony."

Remus looked at Skylar, and then wilted, glancing away slightly guilty.

"He's right, Sky." Sirius quietly mentioned, "Just...just look at Adrian. The poor kid is more scarred than you can believe, halfway to St. Mungo's already with how he talks to walls. You don't want that, not now."

"Bed." Mrs. Weasley clipped out, holding the door open. Skylar hunkered down, sighing as he could recognize defeat already.

Fred and George apparated into Ron and Skylar's room only an hour after Mrs. Weasley locked the

door behind her.

Skylar saw the blurred outlines of Fred and George through the darkness of the room, clambering onto Ron and Skylar's mattress as they settled.

"So? The weapon?" Ron asked eagerly, leaning forward in the dark as if he could see them better.

"We didn't hear that bit on the old Extendables," Fred admitted, "Interesting though, wasn't it?"

"What d'you reckon it is?" Skylar asked.

"Could be anything." Fred admitted.

"But there can't be anything worse than the Avada Kedavra curse, can there? What's worse than death?" Ron asked, bafflement thick.

"Maybe it's something that can kill loads of people at once," suggested George.

"Maybe it's some particularly painful way of killing people," Fred added along.

"He's got the Cruciatus Curse for pain," Skylar pointed out knowingly, "He doesn't need anything more efficient than that."

They paused in the dark, thinking and wondering what horrors the weapon could be.

"So who d'you thinks got it now?" George asked.

"I hope it's on our side," Said Ron, sounding nervous.

"If it is, Dumbledore's probably keeping it," said Fred.

"Where? Hogwarts?" Ron hissed out, obviously alarmed.

"Bet it is! That's where he hid the Sorcerer's Stone!"

"A weapon's going to be a lot bigger than the Stone, though!"

"Not necessarily," said Fred, rolling his eyes, "I mean, look at ickle Adrian."

"What do you mean?" said Skylar, blinking in the dark.

"Well, you saw him go at Mundungus. Back when he had all those deals, I reckon he was the most powerful student at Hogwarts. Merlin, I heard he had *Snape* owe him."

"A shame that they shut him down," George sighed wistfully, "I reckon he could have found a way to sneak a centaur in the castle if you paid him enough."

"Probably why they snapped down fast," Fred concluded with a frown, "Isn't a problem when it's just butterbeer. Merlin, remember Callum? He was years above us, able to find dirt on anyone, but he had *nothing* on ickle Adrian."

The statement trailed and tickled something back of Skylar's brain. A weapon that could be hidden, something powerful but disguised…

"What...what if it isn't a *thing.* What if it's a *person?"*

They dropped into silence.

"You mean a dark wizard?" Fred asked confused.

"Yeah mate, they're already looking for those."

"No, no." Skylar shook his head unsure, "Back...back in my third year- you remember the Dementors?"

"Yeah, when you did that Patrony thingy?" Fred tilted his head curiously.

Skylar flushed in the dark, "Er, yeah. But...but right after that, before Moony came in, there was this...*thing,* standing there. I thought it was a Dementor, but it was really small, short I mean. And just standing there. Watching us."

The room got significantly colder.

"Whatcha mean?" George asked, leaning forward to nearly pin Skylar to his bed.

"There's a dark creature out there?" Fred asked excitedly, "We should ask Adrian, he knows all that shite."

"It fought dad," Skylar said quietly, "He said that something bit him, that he almost died. It was right by Hogwarts, outside the wards."

The room turned somber.

The quiet made the approaching footsteps seem very loud.

"Mum," George whispered, and without further ado, both twins vanished with a crack.

Skylar was positive he would not be able to fall asleep; the evening had been so packed with things to think about that he fully expected to lie awake for hours. The next thing he knew, he woke from a curled ball, warm under his bedsheets. Half an hour later, Skylar and Ron were dressed and darting through the dusty drawing room with buckets of soapy water. Fred and George joined them, looking peculiar with tied cloths over their noses and mouths. Each were carrying a large bottle of black sludge like liquid, looking distinctly homemade in the recycled butterbeer bottles.

"Cover your faces and take a spray," Mrs. Weasley said to the group, "It's Doxycide, Adrian made it a few nights ago with some ingredients we found in an abandoned potions room and some he had Tonks fetch from the shops. I've never seen an infestation this bad- go on!"

Hermione gave a shiver, holding her bottle with a hesitant look. "Mrs. Weasley are you sure this is safe?"

"Of course it is, dear." Mrs. Weasley assured her with a small smile, "Adrian has already helped with a rather prickly gnome in the walls, rather fascinating to see the boy at work actually. Doxies require more work- go on!"

"I think they brighten this place up!" Sirius cheerfully added, skipping into the room with a basket full of onions, some of them filled with small bite marks, "Anyways, the writing desk *is* a boggart. I'll head with it towards the storage room we cleared out on the third floor, I'll steal Skylar from you."

Skylar exhaled a quiet thanks, grinning behind his tea cloth as Sirius gave a thumbs up. Nobody asked why Sirius was holding a basket of onions.

"Right you are, Sirius." Mrs. Weasley agreed. They were both speaking in carefully light, polite voices that told Skylar that neither had forgotten their argument before.

Mrs. Weasley peered over a book Skylar recognized. The page on doxies in Gilderoy Lockhart's Guide to Household Pests was lying open on the sofa, large passages crossed out in red ink and scribbled over in a certain Slytherin's aristocratic handwriting. For some reason, the idea that Adrian had absolutely *demolished* the passages left him gleeful.

"Come on, Sky." Sirius chimed happily, steering the younger boy out of the room and towards the stairwells, "Remember those Hippogriffs? Or that dragon you faced?"

They found the landing and took a left, down a hallway Skylar hadn't ever traveled before. "Yeah?"

Sirius had a mischievous expression on his face, "This is the exact same thing."

Skylar blinked in confusion, feeling dread as they neared an unmarked door, "What- Sirius what do you mean-"

"Go get him!" Sirius cheered, opening the door and scooting Skylar inside with one large hand.

Skylar stumbled, nearly tripping over a tiny rug in the doorway. The floorboards were polished, and the room was empty except for a couple trunks and a large bed filled with a mound of clothing. It wasn't anything like Skylar's room, the one he quickly decorated with posters and spare knicknacks. The room was cold, and isolating.

Then, a low sound of something scraping softly was all Skylar could hear. He was reminded instantly of the dragon's tail over rock- and then he saw black scales emerge from a spelled corner of one of the trunks.

The snake was horrifying, angry, and coming *right* at him. Doxies his arse, he'd take them any day over this.

"No-no!" Skylar blurted, raising his arms defensively as he skittered back towards the bedroom door Sirius was keeping shut, "I'm supposed to wake him, Sirius threw me in here because he's a *sadist!"*

Sirius laughed with a hoarse bark on the other side of the door, muffled slightly by the wood.

The snake paused, lifting itself upwards as its head rose to Skylar's naval, its tongue flickering incessantly.

"I'm just supposed to wake him because there's a boggart, I'm sorry, I'm *sorry, please* don't *eat me."*

Skylar's voice was totally not a whine at the end.

The snake paused, then opened its mouth in a large yawn and lowered itself to the ground. It shifted, and slithered back into the crate.

The lump on the bed didn't move at all despite the noise.

With the immediate danger gone, well, Skylar felt that he had already tempted fate, why not continue?

Skylar leapt onto the bed, his stomach landing unfortunately on a bony elbow. His breath left him

with an *oof.*

Then Adrian *moved,* which drove the elbow further into his stomach and sent him to the floor in crippling pain.

"What, the *hell!"* Adrian roared, his voice croaky and hoarse as the boy jolted out of bed, scrambling to try and orient himself, *"Lutain!"* He roared, although it came out mostly as a whine. Adrian's arms swung pointedly, hands coiled into fists which thankfully never collided with a target.

The black snake head poked out of the box, now dangerously close to Skylar's face. The snake hissed something low, although it didn't seem threatening.

Adrian pouted, seemingly due to how docile his snake looked.

"Sorry," Skylar wheezed, trying not to laugh at how ridiculous Adrian's bedhead was, "supposed to help with a boggart."

Adrian huffed sourly, blinking owlishly as he fumbled on a side table to find his wand. He held it firmly, sliding it up his sleeve before collapsing back into his bed.

"*No,"* Skylar tried not to laugh, "No, you're supposed to get *up.*"

Adrian mumbled something into his pillow, that sounded suspiciously like 'bite me,'

The door opened slowly, Sirius peeking through with a hopeful look. "All fingers still attached?"

Skylar wiggled his fingers at him wordlessly.

"Somebody's in a good mood," Sirius sang, peering at the lump on the bed amused.

Adrian reached for his side table, grabbing an unnecessarily extravagant silver goblet filled with water, and chucked it at Sirius' head.

Sirius ducked, although he spluttered when the water matted down his shaggy hair. He pulled out his wand, levitating the blankets off Adrian's body. Adrian moaned into his pillow, slowly increasing in volume until it was a muffled screech. It almost sounded like the terrifying falcon of his.

"We're uh, supposed to be dealing with the one boggart." Skylar provided helpfully.

"Good. Have fun. See you later." Adrian mumbled back, his eyes forcefully closed.

"You're coming with incase it's a manticore!" Sirius chimed in helpfully.

Adrian scoffed into his pillow, "A Manticore wouldn't fit."

"See, you're perfect." Sirius grinned, "Grab a robe and come on. It's almost noon. Wakey wakey."

Adrian flipped off Sirius with one hand, the one without his wand in his sleeve. "I already *gave* you my notes on boggarts."

"Yeah, but see, if you don't do this then you'll be cleaning up doxies." Sirius pointed out, Adrian groaned into his pillow again.

"Light them on fire," Adrian moaned tiredly, trying to roll away from the bright light, "Throw

'Dungus at em."

Skylar found himself smiling, something about Adrian's actions were rather plesant to watch. Ron was always messy in the morning, more grouchy and disoriented than anything. Hermione was far too chipper and an early bird. Adrian was...well, Adrian was incredibly relatable.

"C'mon mate," Skylar teased, laughter just shy of breaking free, "I don't think the Doxies would touch Mundungus, maybe they'd catch something."

Adrian paused before he submitted himself to sleepy giggles, vibrating his entire chest.

Sirius looked rather amused with the situation, "Merlin, you *are* in a good mood. I thought you were going to try and strangle me with the blankets again?"

Adrian only laughed a bit more into the pillow, snuggling further into it even without the blankets.

"No, nope none of that," Sirius rolled his eyes, "I'll curse you with hiccups-"

Adrian's body tensed and *instantly (*almost as if he wasn't aware of it) he was sitting upright and already sliding to a very unstable standing position. His eyes were sleep glazed, bed head messy and silly to look at. His sleep shirt was oversized, hanging low over one shoulder revealing a thick purple scar, puckered over his collarbone. Adrian blinked once, then he scowled at Sirius in a vaguely irritated way, "oh *ha ha.* Nice one, play the curse threat Black, why don't you." Adrian huffed sourly, he grabbed one robe that seemed to be of fairly high quality, although his sleep clothes were secondhand at best. He didn't seem happy, but then again he never did. "Stupid mutt."

Skylar felt a sharp pang of guilt, and Sirius grimaced silently at it also. Skylar would have to pass along the word subtly that even teasingly mentioning that they'd curse Adrian was something to avoid. It didn't seem like Adrian truly cared, but it was unsettling to see the instinctual reaction.

"Potions!" Sirius reminded, recovering quickly. Without stopping to see if Adrian was going to follow through, the man took off vanishing down the hallway to grab the writing desk from the doxy infested room.

Adrian mumbled something under his breath that most likely was rude. Skylar tried not to pay attention, although he found himself gasping in surprise at the sheer *amount* of potions in the one trunk. At least three dozen, attached to an expandable rack that slid out from the trunk lid like one of Madam Pomfrey's private storages. Adrian casually selected three potions, one a soft blue, one pale yellow, and another one that swirled between red and blue. There were empty vials on the racks, next to the ones he selected. Daily doses of potions.

Adrian downed them without grimacing once, obviously with experience.

Skylar tried not to think about how Remus was so sure that he was sick in some way.

"Alright, Golden Boy, where's the boggart?" Adrian sighed, seeming somewhere between annoyed and still exhausted.

Skylar flushed, although he bit his tongue. "Some storage room on this floor, Sirius said they wanted it out of the way."

Adrian nodded slightly, "Yeah, down the hall. Remus uses it for his changes. Come on, saviour."

"Don't call me that." Skylar bit out. Adrian's lips twitched amused.

Adrian grabbed shoes, expensive dragon skin that didn't line up with Remus' shopping list. They made their way down the hall, Adrian leading as he opened one door a fair distance away.

The room had been cleared out, except for one *large* metal cage that took care of half of the room. Adrian didn't look at it once, although Skylar felt slightly sick at the sight.

"The dragon awakens!" Sirius cackled, doing a small spin as the writing desk shook ominously.

"Place the one ward, the magic blocker." Adrian yawned, rubbing his eyes tiredly, "you know, abscondam vestigium."

Sirius looked baffled, "What?"

Sirius paused and tilted his head sideways, blinking at Adrian in surprise.

Adrian looked annoyed, "The ward. It blocks the trace, Merlin's beard, how do you get *anything* done around here?"

Sirius looked intrigued, "It blocks the trace? On a wand?"

"Yes, like I just *said."* Adrian groaned, looking agitated, "Cast it so I can be useful, you skrewt."

Sirius looked amazed, "I've never heard of that. It's illegal, but I'm fired so, why not. Imagine if that spell was *known,* good Merlin, Don't tell the twins."

Sirius followed Adrian's words, casting the spell with stiff movements. Finally a dark red line trailed out of his wand, flickering through the air with the pattern of a dragonfly's wing.

"Where did you learn this thing?" Sirius looked on the verge of cackling, "Merlin knows what chaos Prongs, Moony, and I could've done."

Adrian yawned, his jaw clicking quietly but audibly, "I don't know, Bella knew it. I think someone made the spell, but not her."

Skylar twitched at the thought, but it didn't seem to deter Sirius.

"Well I bloody love this." Sirius smiled up at the faint shimmering in the air.

"Great," Adrian deadpanned, pulling out his wand tiredly, "Open that bloody desk. Potter near it, right?"

Sirius looked surprised but nodded, "Er, yeah. Your boggart is still a Dementor, right?"

Skylar nodded, "Yes- stay close to me and I'll cast a patronus for you Adrian-"

"I can cast my own bloody patronus." Adrian snapped out, swishing his wand through the air from shoulder to hip in warm up that seemed like he was well used to combating foes. He repeated it twice, rolling his right shoulder before rising and falling on his toes for a few seconds. He shifted backwards slightly, into a small exhausted stance. Adrian hadn't ever positioned himself in such a way before, Skylar didn't know the other boy seemed like such a capable dueler. He likely could have fought them at Hogwarts a dozen times.

With a cold feeling, Skylar realized he probably *had* dueled many times.

Skylar wondered morbidly what the incantation was for the spell that had wounded Adrian so terribly.

"Right," Sirius nodded, not looking that shocked with Adrian's absent minded movements. Sirius took a few steps to stand behind Skylar as he swished his wand through the air, "Alohamora."

The writing desk's lock clicked open, and the door swung open. From inside, a large black ghostly figure billowed out, rising towards the ceiling.

The room chilled, Sirius shivered slightly and Skylar took a half step back. Adrian didn't move.

"Well, that's a boggart." Sirius grimaced, looking at Skylar encouragingly, "You've got this, pup."

Skylar nodded with a smile, he lifted and pointed his wand. He spoke the incantation, and an antelope burst outwards, skittering forward on feeble legs. It tossed its head, dancing on limbs much more delicate than his father and mother's deer pair.

The boggart recoiled, swinging out and around from the patronus. It made its way in a large arc, directly towards Adrian.

Adrian pointed his wand lazily upwards, pausing and freezing suddenly as his eyes glazed. Then they snapped forward, and he strode forward, past Skylar and near the Dementor.

It bubbled, its body struggling as it seemed to blur, almost disoriented as Adrian approached it. It looked almost blurred, out of focus or smeared ink. For a split second the dementor seemed twisted between it, and an unidentified humanoid face. Something with pale skin, tall, looming, distinctly masculine.

Adrian scoffed quietly, "None of that," he muttered, loud enough for Skylar to hear. The boggart seemed stuck, flickering too quickly between two frames of a picture.. Then it solidified as a dementor, and Adrian smiled. "Hello there," he nearly cooed, taking a step forward and outstretching his left hand, the right at his waist with his wand still in his grasp.

"Selwyn!" Sirius barked sharply in alarm, stumbling forward, before staying behind Skylar. Skylar didn't know what Adrian had *done,* but somehow the boggart wasn't shifting form anymore. The dementor rattle something ominous, and it *flinched* back.

Adrian paused, tilting his head wonderingly at the Dementor as he walked ever so close. It was trapped between the antelope and the back wall.

Then Adrian reached out, one hand outstretched towards one long tail of the Dementor's cloak.

Skylar's breathing stopped.

The Dementor *backed* away with a low rattling noise of pain.

Adrian's expression flickered, from one of glee to one of righteous fury. His face twitched into a snarl and he drew his wand- from the tip a large silvery creature exploded out angrily.

'He does know how to cast a Patronus.' Skylar thought in a daze, watching in curiosity as the silver shape solidified. Something that looked like a crocodile, maw as long as Skylar's leg. It snapped its jaws once, forcing the Dementor even further back into the corner.

"Selwyn!"

Adrian stomped back, looking still annoyed although the crocodile or alligator kept the boggart back in a corner, "It's trapped. You know a Boggart-Banishing Charm? Or are we trapping it?"

Sirius looked angry, his knuckles were pale around his wand, "Yeah. Fine."

Adrian's face shifted once again, and he looked *ticked,* "Okay *what.* You were the one to yank me out of bed, I did what you wanted."

Sirius' jaw clenched, "You were here in case it *wasn't* a boggart."

"I already told you it would be!" Adrian hissed back furiously, spinning on his heel to point his wand and snap out a spell Skylar had never heard. It shot out rather quickly, and the boggart *shrieked,* sounding very un-dementor as it curled in on itself.

Sirius' nostrils flared ,he banished the boggart, which vanished in a scream that sounded suspiciously like a cat yowl. The moment the boggart left, both the reptilian patronus and the antelope faded away.

"*What,"* Sirius fumed, "was *that?* Trying to *touch it?"*

Adrian crossed his arm with a frown, "What? I knew it would stay like that. It was trapped. I wanted to touch it."

"That could have- have *killed* you!" Sirius gaped.

Adrian rolled his eyes, "It didn't."

Skylar looked uncomfortable, "How- how did it stay mine? Like, as a Dementor?"

Adrian looked at Skylar as if he was a moron, "Occlumency. You *do* know what that is, right?"

Skylar flushed and looked at his feet.

Sirius' jaw tensed, "Why was it afraid of you?"

Adrian shrugged.

Sirius looked unsure but nodded slightly, still annoyed, "I'm sure Molly could use your *expertise* with the doxies. Of course, without magic."

Adrian groaned lowly, although he did shuffle out of the room.

Skylar swallowed looking at the corner where the Dementor had been trapped, "Sirius, Dementors don't act like that, do they?"

Sirius' jaw tensed, "I think Moony's right. Something's wrong with that kid."

Skylar tried his best not to think about the strange Boggart-incident earlier that morning while he and Hermione emptied all of the glass cabinets around the house. They were filled with an assortment of odd objects, most of which required a lot of concentration as many of the objects seemed reluctant to leave their dusty shelves.

Adrian joined them, looking just as bored as he normally did. He apparently had arranged something with Remus, where he had his own pile of unique objects he wanted to keep. The twins had called it his dragon hoard, and he was fiercely protective of his pile especially when Mundungus spotted something shiny. Most of the trinkets were useless or random broken bits, but it was an incentive for the boy to actually help out. Otherwise, Adrian would have stayed in his room all day or linger in the kitchen. From what Skylar could see, there was a half dozen claws of

various sizes and shapes, one coiled up snake-skin, a jar of eyes, and an old pelt.

Sirius sustained a bad bite from a silver snuffbox; within seconds, his bitten hand had developed an unpleasant crusty covering like a tough brown glove.

He threw the box into the disposal pile, although Skylar spotted George carefully sneak the back with a cloth wrapped hand.

They found an unpleasant-looking silver instrument, something like a many-legged pair of tweezers. It scuttled up Skylar's arm and tried to puncture his skin with its little fangs; Sirius seized it and smashed it with a heavy book. Hermione pulled out a pair of twisting horns, still attached to a yellowing skull. Adrian was quick to snatch the horns, handling them reverently as he added them to his own pile.

"What the blazes is this?" Fred muttered, pulling out something in a glass bottle, plugged with a rabbit's foot on a silver chain.

"Toss it," Sirius advised, opening another drawer without care. Adrian scowled as he traced the path of the rabbit's foot, looking at it almost somberly.

"Where's Tonks?" Fred asked, poking his head out to draw Sirius' attention. George snuck across the carpet on his belly, obscenely wiggling before he could pluck the rabbits' foot out of the pile. He winked at Adrian with a small grin.

"Off with Moony, getting groceries I think." Sirius shrugged, brows furrowing at something inside Fred's cabinet, "He tends to stay away when we're going through the collections. Merlin knows something in here might spell him into a frenzy."

Skylar nodded in understanding, wincing as an enchanted ratty quil flapped around before sinking its broken nib into his thumb.

Adrian gasped suddenly, a high pitched noise that was relatively quiet, yet very loud in the room. Seconds after, the crystal cup he was holding fell to the ground and shattered into a million pieces. The shards scattered across the room, dangerous to Ron's sock clad feet.

"Stay still!" Sirius shouted, drawing his wand and banishing the broken glass with a cautious look, Adrian was thankfully wearing the dragonhide boots he loved so dearly.

"You alright there?" Sirius checked cautiously, weaving his way around his frozen helpers.

Adrian nodded, turning around and blinking wildly, "Er- yes. Fine. I just…" He stumbled towards a couch, thankfully free of objects. He collapsed on it heavily, pulling his legs up around him in a small curled up ball. He had a highly dazed expression, he reminded Skylar of Luna Lovegood.

Fred immediately ventured over to Adrian's cabinet, poking around inside cautiously. He shook his head at Sirius, who still looked rather concerned.

"You alright? Need me to run and get Moony?"

"Fine." Adrian clipped out, blinking slowly although he still seemed rather disoriented.

"Are you sure?" Hermione asked concerned, setting her new treasure down on the discard pile; a golden locket.

Adrian's eyes fixed on the locket before flickering to her face. He smiled unconvincingly.

"Positive. I must have touched something unfriendly. Give me a few moments."

George looked unsure, although he joined Fred at Adrian's abandoned cabinet where they diligently searched through the contents carefully. They were considerate enough to add a silver scale into Adrian's box.

Adrian's eyes slipped close as he felt it- he*felt* it. Small whispers, tickling the back of his mind, reaching out like bean sprouts.

They tickled and poked and it was so...so…

'Little one…' It hissed, tingling and numbing as it caressed his thoughts, twisting through his barriers without pause, *'Where are you little one?'*

Adrian stood, unaware of his movement until he heard Hermione say his name.

"Fine," he smiled, polite as he skittered wide around the pile, the tingling and tugging drew his hand out to almost brush the gold…

He pulled his arm back, swallowing as he continued to her cabinet, pulling out dusty wax seals to add to the discard pile.

Kreacher sidled into the room, once more bemoaning and crying as it attempted to smuggle things away under its loincloth.

'Take me, cherish me,' the locket whispered, a hissing croon that made Adrian's fingers twitch, *'Hide me, Hadrianus.'*

Adrian's head snapped around, just in time to watch the house elf slip the locket under his cloth and out of sight. The whispers didn't stop until the elf vanished from sight.

They moved from the drawing room to a dining room on the ground floor where they found spiders as large as saucers lurking in the dresser. Ron left the room hurriedly to make a cup of tea, and did not return for a hour and a half. Adrian gave one look at Sirius before he huffed and started stomping. The clicking heels of his boots were high quality spider squashers.

The china, which bore the Black crest and motto, was all thrown unceremoniously into a sack by Sirius, and the same fate met a set of old photographs in tarnished silver frames; the occupants squealed shrilly as the glass covering them smashed.

The doorbell rang several times a day, which was the cue for Sirius's mother to start shrieking again. Twice, Adrian had slipped away before Sirius had noticed to rage war on the portrait with whatever object he had nearby. He was obscenely proud of the hair thin scratch he had inflicted with one cursed dagger, before Sirius wrestled it away from him. Snape flitted in and out of the house several more times, though to Skylar's relief, they didn't meet face to face. The one occasion Adrian came stomping in with a wild fury around him was only after he had briefly encountered Snape. Skylar didn't think the two wouldn't get along.

Sometimes, the visitors stayed to help; Tonks joined them for a memorable afternoon in which they found a murderous old ghoul lurking in an upstairs toilet, and Lupin, who was staying in the room next to Adrian, helped them repair a grandfather clock that had developed an unpleasant habit of shooting bolts at passersby.

Mundungus redeemed himself slightly in Mrs. Weasley's eyes by rescuing Ron from an ancient set of purple robes that tried to strangle him. Somehow, the robes mysteriously caught on fire, which

burnt off Mundungus' left eyebrow. Adrian was sent to the floor laughing whenever he saw the shorter man.

Remus swiftly went through the pile Adrian had produced, looking everything over with a critical eye. Almost everything was accepted, except for the charmed bird head which seemed to chirp and move with a level of animation that obviously disturbed the other man. Adrian pridefully ascended the stairs to his room, carrying his box of prizes to decorate his room.

Despite the distractions, Adrian couldn't help but feel intrigued by the locket that had called to him so strongly. It was eerily similar to his father's diary, the way it demolished his occlumency barriers should have been horrifying.

For dinner, everyone descended to the kitchens once more while Remus promised to bring him a bowl after. Adrian thanked him, staying reclusively inside his room until he was certain that everyone was far below.

Then he slipped outside, grabbing Lutain and venturing around the smaller corners of the giant house.

He followed the barest traces, the slight whispers that seemed to permeate the air and sink into his skin.

"What are we looking for?" Lutain asked curiously, hanging leisurely around his shoulders like a scarf.

"The house-elf." Adrian explained, tilting his head as he ducked through an archway into an unexplored room in the building, "It took something I want."

"You want? Was it a skull? Bones?"

Adrian smiled fondly, "No, it was a locket. Very pretty."

"I did not know you liked a necklace." Lutain hissed amused, *"Am I not good enough?"*

"You're perfect," Adrian crooned happily, stroking the small scales affectionately, "the *best* scarf."

Lutain flicked his tongue in good nature, glancing around curiously as they opened one cabinet, seeing nothing but books inside.

"You were here before, with the crazy lady." Lutain noted.

Adrian hummed a positive, "For a birthday. She gave me books."

"Are they still here?"

Adrian scoffed, "Unlikely. They probably already cleared them all out. I could check, but they're probably gone."

"I do not smell anything in here." Lutain added, *"I can help? Say if smell anything?"*

"That would be perfect," Adrian smiled, leaving the room and entering a new one.

The system worked rather well, Lutain would refer him to cupboards or areas where he smelled something. Only once did it turn out to be something vicious- Lutain took quick work of sending it howling and moaning back into its cranny. They left quickly.

They were on the fourth floor, where old abandoned bedrooms were located. Lutain directed him into one room, and the small attached cupboard on the side.

The whispers started, and Adrian smiled.

"Found it," Adrian assured his friend, and they opened the cupboard. Inside was a mess of old mildewed cloth and various trinkets. The locket was hidden under one blanket, piled up on the left side.

He grabbed the locket- bitingly cold in his hand. He tugged it out, closing the closet quickly and hurrying out of the room before the house elf could return.

"Is that it?" Lutain asked curiously, "*It smells sour."*

"Do I?" Adrian asked curiously.

Lutain hesitated, before he flickered his tongue three times and tilted his head, *"A bit. Not too much."*

Adrian hummed, finally reaching the landing for the third floor and taking the bend back towards his room.

He arrived before dinner was over. He shut the door behind him, locking it with the old deadbolt. He uncovered the locket, gazing at the beautifully crafted serpent on the golden cover.

It whispered to him, promises and praise.

Adrian traced the ornate shape, the curl of the serpent and the glittering emerald eyes. He pressed the clasp to open it, yet it wouldn't budge.

"Hello," He spoke softly to it, tracing the shapes gently, "My name is Adrian. How are you able to get through my barriers?"

It hissed, repeating his name lowly over and over in a crooning mantra, *Adriannnnnn*

"Is it speaking?" Lutain asked curiously, butting it with his snout, *"I don't hear anything."*

The soft crooning whispers of the locket stilled, into silence.

Adrian rolled the locket in his grasp, feeling it gently and huffing quietly in annoyance

"What is it?" Lutain asked curiously, peering at it from multiple angles.

"I don't know," Adrian confessed, picking it up by its golden chain to dangle between both of them, "but I think it's important."

Despite living in the same building as Adrian, Skylar rarely actually encountered him.

He saw him in the mornings and at dinner, eating an obscene amount of food. Even Ron was gobsmacked by the amount of buttered rolls Adrian could scarf down like some sort of ravenous beast. Hermione was disgusted by the display, although Adrian's dry sarcasm was a welcome relief from the usual crude humor.

Fred and George absolutely adored Adrian, and would teasingly bring him up whenever Mundungus got a bit too rowdy. Skylar had asked the twins if they knew why Adrian and

Mundungus were so aggressive to one another- they hadn't a clue. Sirius helpfully mentioned that the first time Adrian *looked* at Mundungus, he snapped and tried to smack 'Dungus to the floor.

Remus tended to go off on runs with Tonks, looking for supplies that the two could sniff out and snag while on the run. That, and Tonks was absolutely bewitched by the cute market stalls in Muggle London. Whenever the two left, Adrian retreated to his room likely to sleep or brood once more.

Sometimes though...Skylar didn't know. There were small moments where Sirius seemed a little...*too* understanding. Sirius didn't talk much about his childhood, but Skylar assumed that he saw a lot of parallels between himself and Adrian. Skylar thought that it bothered his Godfather quite a bit, seeing such similarities. Sirius prided himself on being on the *'right side',* it must pain him to see what his cousin had done. Despite that, Sirius was a wonderful addition to Skylar's life, and a great way to stave off boredom.

"Padfoot!" Skylar shouted, poking his head in and out of various rooms. His godfather sometimes tended to nap on furniture in his animagus form, leaving behind large clumps of black fur.

He wasn't there, nor was he in the cleaned parlor or the kitchen stealing bits of pastries before Mrs. Weasley could chase him out.

Skylar ran up the stairway, his legs burning by the time he got to the highest floor. They hadn't managed to clean up here yet, the dust itself was nearly as thick as a galleon. The ghoul that had hidden itself away was only one of the numerous threats that lurked in the house. Even the air itself seemed darker, clouded by some sort of...stagnation.

"Padfoot?"

A second later Skylar heard a muffled noise, resembling a vulgar swear. Skylar's lips twitched into a smile, and a second later Sirius stuck his head out of a doorway.

"Sky!" Sirius barked out in surprise, blinking in a silent question.

"I didn't know where you were," Skylar admitted with a small smile, "Ron and Hermione were kidnapped by Mrs. Weasley. I barely escaped with my life."

Sirius barked a laugh before beckoning the younger boy to come over, a second later Skylar was peering around the doorway into the room he had clearly never seen before.

Adrian was sitting on the floorboards, clawing grooves into the panels. Adrian peered upward, removing bits of wood from under his nails. He spotted Skylar then groaned loudly and slumped backwards to lay in a sprawl.

"Stop that you dramatic pegasus." Sirius huffed, passing through something which rippled only a few steps into the room. It took Skylar a second to recognize it as the ward Adrian had shown him before, the one which blocked the wands' trace.

"Why did you have to invite *him."* Adrian seethed, "did you really *not* think this through?"

Sirius blinked before he wilted slightly, "Actually...shite."

Adrian snorted, struggling to withhold a laugh as Sirius chewed his lower lip as if sheepish.

"What are you guys doing?" Skylar asked hesitantly, skimming the contents of the room absentmindedly, before he paused and backtracked to actually *look* at the room.

Paintings were stacked up on the far left wall, all in various states of destruction. The occupants of the portraits had long since fled, especially with the massive gouges and lacerations across the canvas. Scattered across the floor were the remnants of marble busts, blown apart and sending fine powder across the floorboards. One bust gazed out sightlessly, missing the lower half of its face. Couches and chairs had the upholstery nearly falling out, large wads of what looked like horse hair spilling out like fine silken entrails. The wooden writing desk which once contained a Boggart was scattered across the floor, doors looking singed and burned while the cabinet itself had a chunk missing as if a dragon took a bite from it.

"Yeah Black, what *are* we doing?" Adrian snickered, still laying sprawled on his back without looking at all like he would be lifting himself up soon. In fact, he looked more relaxed and boneless than Skylar could remember.

"Well, uh," Sirius fidgeted, using his wand to scratch the back of his head, "Well...Sky…"

"Well, *Sky."* Adrian mimicked from the floor, pausing before laughing quietly to himself.

"Does dad know you're up here?" Skylar frowned, the room itself seemed almost...*smokey.*

"Er, well…" Sirius shifted where he stood uncomfortably, "Well Sky, ah…"

Adrian laughed quietly again, as if he took personal pleasure from Sirius' discomfort.

"We're cursing the stuffings out of sofa," Adrian helpfully added from the floor, "It's *delightful."*

"Shut it you mangy bag of arse." Sirius muttered, scowling at Adrian who only grinned breathlessly.

"I don't…" Skylar swallowed unsure, "I don't understand? Sirius what are...uh."

Adrian giggled, Sirius looked ready to kick the boy.

"Okay, okay Sky." Sirius sighed through his nose, lifting his head skywards in a lungful expression, "Bloody hell of all days Moony isn't here. Okay, so, er...sometimes when witches or wizards are raised in dark households they er...they get *used* to it."

Skylar shifted his weight uncomfortably, "Okay?"

"Like, the dark magic. It er, it kinda...stays in the air?" Sirius waved his hand as if trying to explain it through body cues also, "and sometimes when you're removed from it, it kinda...it can shock your system and get painful, or get you too twitchy and snappy."

Adrian smacked the floorboards twice with his palm, the loud noise snapped Skylar's attention to the boneless other, "It's called dark magic addiction you twit."

Sirius scowled darkly and Adrian grinned, the smile was large and slightly unstable. Sirius flinched when he spotted it.

"I don't understand," Skylar admitted quietly, "I- dad doesn't talk about dark magic that much. Mum doesn't either, she gets this...sad look on her face."

Sirius grimaced, "That's Snivellus. Some sort of drama back in the day, she doesn't really like to think about that."

"Snape should suck a screwt." Adrian muttered from the ground, lazily tracing his hand along the

knots of the floorboard.

"Ignore him, he's wasted." Sirius dismissed Adrian. Adrian gaped, before glaring and complaining sourly.

Skylar smiled slightly, finding this...version of Adrian rather amusing to interact with.

"Anyways, so since this poor bloke here has er...has an overindulgence of that sort of magic, he was getting more and more high strung without letting some of it out." Sirius shrugged with a small twitch, "It's therapeutic I swear."

"He's not saying that *he's* also stir crazy, can't deny a dark family, *Black."* Adrian snarked back, looking very self satisfied when Sirius flushed.

"Shove it you *twit."*

"Tell that to that *stinging hex* four minutes ago." Adrian shot back, looking satisfied when Sirius looked distinctly uncomfortable.

"Wait," Skylar floundered before trying to find the proper words. "So...it's...sometimes if you're exposed to dark magic, you need to indulge slightly to not have it hurt you? Like a...a potions problem?"

Adrian snorted so hard he choked, "Merlin, did you just compare this to *rehab?"*

Sirius sighed, "Look mate, I ah, we can't really help it-"

"I'm not upset." Skylar chewed his lip quietly, "I mean, I don't really *know* that much about this, but I don't think it's fair to just...judge without knowing both sides, you know?"

Sirius looked very relieved, "James isn't very happy about it but he gets why Moony and I do this here and there. Can't help families, you know?"

Adrian groaned from the floor, "Can you leave already so I can destroy a couch?"

Sirius looked ready to scold the black haired boy but Skylar beat him to it, "Go ahead."

Adrian sat upright and stared at Skylar blankly. Skylar didn't know what the other was trying to find in his expression, but when Adrian frowned slightly Skylar guessed he didn't find whatever it was.

"Alright…" Adrian trailed off lowly, looking over at a couch in one of the better states, "*Abrumpo!"*
Sirius jolted forward in alarm, face an expression of panic. Skylar's mouth opened but he only inhaled sharply when the resounding curse blasted through the air as fast as a snitch. It sizzled on contact, slicing cleanly through the couch with the vicious power of a claymore through butter. The couch squealed and then collapsed inwards, crumpling to the ground split evenly in half. The wall behind the couch had a slash in it, the curse slicing nearly half a foot into the plaster and wood. The air sizzled and sparked like ozone, contributing to the strange fogginess in the air which made Skylar's fingers tingle.

Sirius looked upset yet at the same time he looked like he had expected it. "We didn't *agree* to that curse, bollocks-" Sirius hissed under his breath before taking three steps forward to catch the slowly slumping figure of Adrian. It looked powerful, and it seemed very dark.

"Sorry, Sky. He's out for the count," Sirius sighed, grunting under Adrian's weight.

"No I'm not," Adrian protested dazed, "One more, two more, I can *destroy* that couch."

"I'm sure you can," Sirius soothed, not even blinking as he started to drag the boy towards the door. Adrian lolled with the movement, looking boneless as if barely conscious.

Skylar found himself almost laughing, either due to Adrian's drugged state or due to the *horrific* devastation of the single curse. He had heard the rumors of course, that Adrian had set people on fire. Hermione didn't talk about it often, but a girl in Slytherin had *burned.* This wasn't one step in the other direction, it was a *quidditch post* away from fire.

"No!" Adrian snapped, jolting free and into a standing position, swaying slightly yet eerily focused. His eyes were too bright, "No- I'm not *done yet."*

Sirius raised his arms in annoyance, but Skylar noticed that he had his eyes tracking Adrian's wand's movements quite carefully.

Adrian didn't seem to care that Skylar was in the room anymore, he turned and started attacking the couch with fervor. Hissing out curse after curse, the air was almost suffocating and very quickly the couch was bubbling and torn with stuffing pooling out. Then the desk exploded, lacerations spreading outwards like a clawed beast had used it as a scratching post.

Sirius moved, quickly placing one hand on Skylar's shoulder to shove him backwards gently, shielding him if necessary. Shrapnel rained down around them, glowing red resembling ash more than pieces of furniture; embers falling on ancient Pompeii.

Adrian didn't stop, a grin spreading across his face which unnerved Skylar beyond words. Seconds later the wall groaned and collapsed. Only then did Adrian stop, keeling over and bracing himself on his knees. His breaths were heavy pants, sweat trailing over his jaw as if he had run a great distance. His entire body shook as if freezing, he was listing slightly to the one side.

"Adrian, you're don-" Sirius started, only for Adrian to whirl around looking far too disoriented but *aware.*

"Bugger off Bella!" He hissed back, swaying and at that moment, Skylar realized quite clearly he didn't know where he was.

"You should go," Sirius muttered very quietly, nudging Skylar behind him with his shoulder. Skylar ducked out, closing the door quietly behind him. They must have set up a silencing ward, or at least a sound muffling one. Before Skylar could get the door closed all the way, he heard a single outraged shriek and the beginning clatter of something breaking. Adrian's face looked like the silent screaming expression of Bellatrix Lestrange in all of her Azkaban posters.

Train

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian is finally free, finds Luna again, and sets the train on fire.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to my wonderful Beta collective.
Feel free to check out my Tumblr (Digitalta) for faster responses to questions, fanart, and other information regarding this story.

'Sometimes I feel like there's nothing. Inside my body, where my lungs and stomach are. Just an empty cavern where potions go and slosh around. And I'm always so hungry.'

Dumbledore returned one afternoon, accompanied by Moody. Once entering the building, they were quickly shushed into the meeting room. Dumbledore couldn't help but feel amused as he spotted several curious faces look at him from the stairwell.

He took his seat, Alastor settling into another rickety chair heavily.

"Albus," Sirius nodded, closing the door behind as Mrs. Weasley hurried into the room.

"Albus, Alastor," She gushed, looking relieved at their appearance. At once, Dumbledore felt alarmed.

"Molly, what is it?" Alastor asked bluntly, recognizing that something was very much wrong.

"It's that boy," She spoke, voice hushed yet sharp, "Adrian!"

Dumbledore felt himself silently sigh.

"I hate to say it, but she's right, Albus." Sirius grimaced, pulling out a chair for himself, "There's something not right with him. Besides what we thought before."

Moody leant forward, scowling but listening intently.

"He eats too much!" Mrs. Weasley blurted, "Not that he shouldn't- he's a growing boy, but he ate five bowls Albus! *Five* bowls of stew, *and* half of the crumble I made! He still looked hungry!"

Sirius looked away guiltily, which confirmed it.

"Have you talked to Remus about it?" Albus asked quietly.

"I tried, but the little demon went savage on Mundungus again, stabbed him with a fork and looked right happy with it." Sirius grimaced.

"It was horrible, Albus!" Mrs. Weasley whispered sharply.

"That's expected, Molly. We've talked about this, that curse scar likely is making him more aggressive, twisting his thoughts in a way he doesn't even know. We're lucky he only went after Mundungus, and not after one of us in our sleep." Moody grunted.

"His hunger is suspicious," Albus confirmed with a small hum, "Has he been taking the potions Madam Pomfrey gave him?"

"Yes, I don't think they're doing anything. But look, there's more, Albus."

Mrs. Weasley looked at Sirius sharply, and in surprise.

"Out with it," Moody grunted.

"We were cleaning out the cabinets, just getting rid of some of the shite in here. He seemed affected by something, dazed and out of it as if he had been cursed, but he didn't touch anything. Ron was watching, said he wasn't anywhere near anything when he stalled out like that."

Albus brought one hand to his mouth, running his weathered knuckles against his lips.

"I grabbed him to help Sky and me with a boggart, just in case it wasn't a boggart. It *was,* we had Sky closest so we could deal with the Dementor. But ah…" Sirius trailed off, sounding unsure even as he remembered, "He...Adrian walked *up to it,* and it didn't shift. Said something about Occlumency, but, but when he was near the Dementor, he tried to *touch it."*

Moody straightened sharply, "How bad is he hurt?"

Sirius shook his head, "No...he, he...the Dementor looked bloody terrified of him. It was flinching away before Adrian got close. I've never heard of that before."

The room was silent.

"Neither have I." Albus murmered, removing his glasses to clean the lenses automatically, "This is...concerning."

Moody let out a sigh, reclining back in his chair as his magical eye lolled around crazily, "I'll look around. A Dementor shouldn't be scared of anything."

"I know, that's why I wanted to tell you." Sirius agreed with some sort of dreadful expression.

It was an alarming thing to think about, especially with all of the strange ideas and concepts that floated around in his head. Albus didn't have the time or resources to concern himself about Adrian Selwyn, but he was slowly being convinced that the child was something of interest.

"Molly, if you will?" Albus asked politely, nodding towards the door. She floundered for one second before wordlessly stomping out. It was rather rude on his part, and he would apologize to her dearly afterwards.

Sirius grimaced and leant back, crossing his arms, "I reckon Remus told you about the little incidents?"

Moody gave a gruff laughter, something curt and snappish. "Is that what we're calling it these days?"

Sirius' eyes flickered downwards, his expression blank but far past embarrassment or shame. "We

have a good room setup, wards and all. I reckon if we ever get my bitch of a mum off the wall he'd send her screaming."

Dumbledore's fingers folded, curling under his chin as he contemplated his next words carefully. "You've been monitoring his emotional state?"

"Yeah, the potions and stabilizers are working well." Sirius gave a slow nod, "I think he shouldn't need them by the time the school year starts up again."

"He let anything slip?" Moody grunted, eye lolling as the scowl on his lips distorted his face even further.

Sirius felt a small shiver run down his spine, "no. He's...he's just a kid. A really *really* creepy kid, but still just a pup."

"What sort of unsettling things, Sirius?" Dumbledore asked cautiously.

Sirius looked uncomfortable. He was twitching slightly, looking as if he was caught between a lie and a betrayal. "He...he knows a lot of dark magic. I don't mean that he could go off and take down a herd of unicorns but...the spells he knows are...*specific."*

"Specific." Moody dryly echoed, arching one eyebrow as if skeptic of the word choice.

"Pureblood families tend to introduce children through more...neutral spells. Hexes and Curses but small things, you know, make someone sick or give them nightmares."

"Doesn't seem the brat's style." Moody grudgingly agreed. Sirius' face twitched ever so slightly, as if pained.

"I know Bellatrix," Sirius started, voice on the verge of being winded, "she teaches through example, and honestly Albus, most of the magic that child knows is all borderline torture spells. I don't think he knows anything about her anymore, but he knows how to throw slashing curses far too easily for my own comfort."

"How is everyone?" Adrian asked calmly, hissing lowly in such a way that could easily be mistaken as Lutain.

The Nagini Tattoo moved, tugging uncomfortably over his arm and shoulder, *"Well. Master says plans progressing. Want names."*

"Of the Order?" Adrian asked affectionately, heart swelling with happiness as his father talked with him, even through the tattoo.

Nagini paused, then hissed out a single unintelligent *"Yes."*

Adrian almost chuckled, there was something adorable about the tattoo's limited comprehension skills.

"Do you want all of them, or would you like me to break them up?" Adrian inquired, grabbing one of the recent additions to his room- this time, a claw.

He traced the ridges and the unique hook on the underside, likely belonging to some sort of crustacean. Completely mindless, a distraction from the unsettling tugging on his skin and muscles.

Nagini returned, *"Break up, but all now."*

Adrian hummed contently, *"Moody. The real one. Nymphadora Tonks. The Weasleys, or at least all of the ones out of school. Mundungus, feel free to get rid of that one."*

Nagini slithered away, returning ten seconds after her dismissal.

"Did...have you hunted Mundun-gadus?" Nagini faltered, struggling with the name and the question.

Adrian grinned, a large breathless smile that was infectious, *"Only a few times. He's easy to scare, I stabbed him with a fork."*

Nagini left, then returned.

"Master says, 'good'."

Adrian laughed, a bright sound that caused Lutain to peer out curiously, then excitedly as he saw the faintest shift of tattoo'd scales.

"Hello!" Lutain enthused, sliding over happily, *"Hello!"*

"Tell him Lutain says hello," Adrian instructed, stroking his familiar fondly.

"...Master says…'Hello.'"

"Alright, so we have the Potters, Sirius Black, and Remus here also." Adrian helpfully added. He was getting slightly used to Nagini slithering through his skin.

"Ministry?"

"Oh! Uh, let me think." Adrian paused, trying to remember, *"There's some man here who I think is ministry. His name is something Kingston? Kingburn?"*

Nagini dutifully slid out of sight, returning relatively quickly, *"Kingsley?"*

"Yes! That one!" Adrian enthused, *"The house is under the Fidelius charm, it's the one Bella took me to- the-"* Adrian's mouth clogged, leaving him floundering frustrated.

Nagini left, then returned, *"He knows the one. Changed den, hidden."*

Adrian set aside the claw he had been fiddling with, *"Where? Where are you, father?"*

Nagini vanished, and she was gone a long while.

"Where do you think they are?" Lutain hissed interestedly.

"Not sure, I don't know if father has any more houses. They're checking all of Bellatrix's houses, so nothing in her name."

Nagini returned, sliding out from his thigh over his hip towards his throat, *"Rowle, near Kirkwall."*

Adrian let out a hum, smiling and committing the location to memory. He was almost positive none of the Order would search in that area, or in that family. *"I'll let you know if they begin searching around there."*

Nagini left, and returned.

"Good. Bella misses you." The snake hissed, staring out with slit shaped pupils.

Adrian felt the warmth spread through his chest, and bitter pangs of nostalgia. He missed Bella, he truly did. But Bella had changed, she was *different.*

He missed his father more than anything. He was thankful beyond words that he had the tattoo to communicate.

"I miss you." Adrian spoke back quietly, *"Skylar Potter is really bad at spell work."*

"Is he?"

"The best spell he knows is a Patronus. I'm loads better, thanks to you."

The system of communication was poor, rather disjointed and he wasn't sure what exactly was making it through the low intelligence messenger snake.

"Pathetic. Know apparate, ani-magicus?" Nagini stumbled, unsure of the word.

Adrian felt guilt rise up slightly, *"I remember how to apparate. Animagus I haven't- I need a thunderstorm for the potion to work. I'm just waiting."*

"Christmas, animal apparate to den."

Adrian brightened happily, grinning and jolting upright into a sitting position, *"Yes! Yes I can do that!"*

He was going to see his father again, he was going *home.*

Skylar found himself daydreaming about Hogwarts more and more as the end of the holidays approached; he could not wait to see the castle again, to play Quidditch, even to stroll across the vegetable patches to the Herbology greenhouses. It would be a treat to leave the dusty, musty house, where half of the cupboards were bolted shut and Kreacher wheeled insults out of the shadows as you passed. His dad and mum felt bad about leaving him there, although Skylar knew that they had better things to do.

The fact was that living at the headquarters of the anti-Voldemort movement was not nearly as interesting or exciting as Skylar would have expected before he experienced it. Though members of the Order of the Phoenix came and went regularly, sometimes staying for meals (which were always a spectacle if Adrian chose to join them). Mrs. Weasley made sure that Skylar and the others were kept well out of earshot, and nobody, not even Sirius, seemed to feel that Skylar needed to know anything more than he had already. If it hadn't been for Skylar stumbling on the strange therapy Sirius and Adrian experienced, Skylar was near certain he would never have heard about it to begin with.

On the very last day of the holidays, Skylar was dodging Adrian's terrifying Gyrfalcon who was dive bombing Mundungus with shrieks and sharp talons. The white bird was beautiful in a strange way, Skylar was fond of her name, Hedwig.

"Oi!" Fred shouted, popping into existence on the second floor landing, carrying a wad of envelopes. George popped into existence only a second later, "Book Lists have arrived! About time, I thought they'd forgotten, they usually come out much earlier than this…"

Adrian whistled, pointing with one hand at George who held one envelope outstretched. Hedwig

banked upwards again, leaving Mundungus alone with his many hair-thin scratches. Hedwig twisted, snatching one envelope with her talons to deliver it to Adrian's outstretched hand. Her razor claws were only a hair's breadth away from slicing soft skin.

"Bloody hell, that monster almost took my hand off!" George cursed, waving his fist dramatically upwards at Adrian, who grinned openly and carefree.

"Is he smiling?" Fred whispered loudly, almost in awe.

"You caught me in a good mood!" Adrian shouted down the stairwell, giving a two finger salute as he tore into the letter.

It contained two pieces of parchment, the usual reminder that term started on the first of September, the other telling him which books he would need for the coming year.

"Only two new ones," Adrian shouted down the stairwell, the first one to open the letter. "The Standard Book of Spells Grade 5, and Defensive Magical Theory."

Adrian didn't like the sound of the magical theory book. In his experience, all magical theory books were rather rubbish, written by authors who didn't know how to cast a stunner.

Hedwig chirped, shifting her weight and drawing blood with one sharp talon. She had grown restless; Adrian pointed downwards and whistled lowly, instantly the falcon leapt free in eager pursuit of raking talons across the screaming Mundungus.

Adrian returned to his room, a small prance in his step. He would be returning to Hogwarts, where at least he would be relatively *free.* Of course, he wouldn't be able to practice dark magic, although what Remus didn't know would never hurt him. Adalonda likely knew dozens of old spells, lost to history books just like their counterspells.

Packing all of his belongings back into his trunk was a harder endeavor than he had anticipated. It took a bit of thinking, mostly just to fit all of the claws and strange oddities he had obtained from the house inside. It took him hours, multiple times he had to tear out the stacked contents like he was removing the viscera of a slain deer. Once his belongings were scattered, he restarted with a more focused approach. He was occupied most of the day, only venturing out from his chaotic hoard when the promise of food wafted to his room.

Adrian descended down to the basement, Lutain wrapped snugly around his neck and shoulder. He paused in the doorway, eying the large scarlet banner which hung over the heavily laden dinner table. He didn't know that some sort of festivities were going on as well.

'Congratulations Ron and Hermione- New Prefects'

"What the hell." Adrian scrambled, blinking in amazement as he read the banner twice, just to assure himself he wasn't going mad.

"I know," Fred sighed, collapsing heavily on a nearby chair.

Sirius, Tonks, Mad-Eye Moody already were seated around the table. Adrian was rather smug to see Mundungus vacant. Remus had set a chair aside for Adrian, between him and Tonks.

"Prefect, eh?" growled Moody, his normal eye on Ron and his magical eye swiveling around to gaze into the side of his head. "Well, congratulations. Authority figures always attract trouble, but I suppose Dumbledore thinks you can withstand most major jinxes or he wouldn't have appointed you…"

Ron looked rather shaken, but was saved the trouble of responding by the arrival of his father and eldest brother. Mrs. Weasley was in such a good mood, she did not even complain when Mundungus walked in, wearing a long overcoat that seemed oddly lumpy in unlikely places. Mundungus had a few dozen scratches over his scalp, one particularly nasty gouge over his right eyebrow was sporting a dark red scab.

"You!" Mundungus growled, looking ready to chuck the nearest goblet at Adrian's head.

"He has dragon scales in his pocket," Lutain informed Adrian, shifting out from under Adrian's collar like a very curious rope like scarf, *"And smells of blood. The bird got him."* Lutain seemed especially thrilled by that. Hedwig must have actually gotten a few major hits if even Lutain could smell it, likely under the lumpy coat he had something which required bandages.

"Me!" Adrian continued, voice a happy chirp which seemed *just* joyous enough that everyone startled in surprise. Mundungus looked alarmed, so much so that he scrambled to have a proper response.

Tonks whooped, "Adrian! Want some Firebrandy?"

"No! He does *not* want Firebrandy!" Mrs. Weasley quickly interjected, shifting the bottle away from a pouting Tonks. Remus was chuckling softly to himself. What a strange atmosphere, lighthearted and suddenly, Adrian couldn't care about being angry.

"I think a toast is in order," Mr. Weasley said, when everyone had a drink. He raised his goblet, "To Ron and Hermione! The new Gryffindor prefects!"

Ron and Hermione beamed as everyone drank to them, then applauded.

Tonks drifted over, very subtly exchanging Adrian's goblet with her own. She winked at him in good nature, taking a swig of his juice from her goblet. In turn, he grappled for the goblet, chugging a gulp of the searing liquid down his throat. His eyes watered, she beamed.

"I was never a prefect myself," she said brightly, her hair was tomato red and very long. "My Head of House said I lacked certain necessary qualities."

"Like what?" said Skylar, who drifted over curiously.

"Like the ability to behave myself," said Tonks.

Adrian laughed; a loud exploding sound that was both infectious and surprising. Perhaps the firebrandy was loosening him up. Hermione didn't know whether to smile or not, and compromised by choking on a gulp of butterbeer.

"What about you, Sirius?" Skylar asked, grinning boyishly at his godfather.

Sirius gave a loud bark like laugh.

"No one would have made me a prefect, I spent too much time in detention with James. Lupin was the good boy, he got the badge."

Adrian arched his eyebrows at Remus, who blushed furiously as Tonks leapt into a full round of teasing.

"Did someone say my name?" James asked, jumping into the room chaotically with Lily following with a grin.

"Dad! Mum!" Skylar grinned, rushing over with two goblets of Butterbeer.

Adrian's smile faltered slightly, he ignored the two recent additions and took his seat next to Remus.

He served himself a couple baked potatoes, as well as a large portion of chicken. He paused, looking at his plate and the gravy dish not that far away.

He had been raised to eat dignified, if he didn't, well, it annoyed his father.

But his father wasn't *here.*

He grabbed the gravy boat and dumped it over his food so much, the potatoes began to float.

"Making a mess there?" Tonks asked with a grin, poking his floating potato with a spare fork, "Want to see who can eat it faster?"

Adrian watched her slyly, "If you don't shift your mouth, you're on."

Adrian didn't pay that much attention to others around him, he only noticed Tonks' queasy face as she struggled to down one potato in the time it took him to eat two. The chicken didn't last that much longer, nor did the third or fourth large piece.

He slowed eating only when Moody watched him with both eyes, narrowed and scrutinizing.

Skylar flopped over nearby, peering at a folded picture in his hands, tracing the people inside.

"Whatcha got there, Sky?" Tonks asked curiously, looking back at the picture.

"The original Order, or the members of it." Skylar explained, showing the photos.

Adrian peered over lazily, already reaching for this goblet of butterbeer as he observed the photo, "Who are they?"

Skylar grinned and shoved his way between the two, "Dedalus Diggle here, and Emmeline Vance, Edgar Bones...brother of Amelia Bones, Sturgis Podmore, Elphias Doge, Aberforth who is Dumbledore's brother…"

Adrian looked at Lutain who was intently listening, most likely remembering the names for later.

Adrian poked one small watery-eyed man, snorting loudly as the man silently squeaked.

"Yeah, that's ah, Pettigrew." Skylar's tone was clipped, "Betrayed my parents, how Voldemort found me when I was a baby."

Adrian rolled his eyes, a thin cruel smile distorting his features. He didn't look at Skylar, instead his eyes were locked on the ink figure in the picture. "Don't give him credit, he's a rat."

Skylar jumped in surprise, "What? How...What?"

Adrian tensed, noticeably stilling before jerkily shrugging, forcing himself to try and relax as if the information wasn't important. "Target practice."

Skylar took a step back, paling and yet looking fascinating, "Wha- *Padfoot! Dad!"*

The two jolted over at Skylar's sudden yelp. "What is it, pup? You okay?"

Adrian noticed how the two adults quickly stood between the two. As if Adrian was the aggressor, the instigator in any sort of altercation.

"Whoa whoa!" Tonks assured, quickly, lifting both arms in a placating manner. "Nothing going on here! We're good!"

Sirius relaxed at once, James still looked wary, "what is it, Sky?"

Skylar pointed at Adrian in shock, "He says that he *saw* Pettigrew!"

The room chilled. It was as if a fog had descended, invisible yet a heavy discernible weight resting on everyone's skin. The hair on Adrian's arms rose, he resisted a shiver.

"What?" Sirius asked coldly, voice sharp and deadpan although obviously a question. Sirius' face twitched slightly, expression impossible to comprehend. He was distrusting, already shifting his stance ever so slightly into something cautious, as if ready to fend off an explosive attack. Adrian's heart throbbed against his will, at least Remus hadn't reacted sharply.

Adrian swallowed, feeling his skin chill as if he was about to sweat. "He- Wormtail?"

His voice was higher in pitch than he wanted, coming across tense and uncomfortable. Sirius nodded slowly, Adrian noticed how even James' body was tense as if a mere second away from hurling himself into his larger stag form.

"Target practice!" Lutain hissed quickly, *"Made the rat dance!"*

Lutain's quick thinking relieved some of the sudden stress, a cover story that was feasible and unheard to everyone else. Adrian felt nauseous, stumbling out words around his thick lazy tongue.

"I- I used him as target practice? I- I mean Bella and I did." Adrian stumbled over his words, stuttering like a panicking *idiot.* "He- he's shite at blocking."

Sirius relaxed slightly before giving a partially wistful smile. James snorted a loud ugly noise, which seemed to trigger Sirius' hard chuckles. They sounded genuinely amused, in a nostalgic sense that was throbbingly sore."Thank Merlin, he deserves that all right."

James gave a small smile, although he did tug Skylar away from Adrian as the festivities started up once again.

Remus was quite throughout the exchange. After a few moments when tensions simmer low, he leant over towards Adrian carefully. Not intruding on Adrian's personal space, but close enough to create a sense of privacy. "Why Peter?"

Adrian startled, and shrugged limply, reaching out for another buttered roll.

Remus stared at him for a few seconds longer, before he grabbed the entire basket of rolls, much to Adrian's delight, and sat it right in front of him. Nobody commented when Adrian nearly consumed the entire basket.

Adrian had a troubled sleep. His dreams were smattered with strange hissing noises, wheezed groans and something rattling incessantly. He awoke once to see Hedwig sound asleep on a perch above an empty wardrobe, he awoke the second time to smack the locket from where it was vibrating on the nightstand.

The third time Adrian woke up, sunlight was fighting its way through his curtains. He could hear the muffled noises of chaos and commotion; Adrian burrowed his head into his pillow in a futile denial that it was indeed morning. Eventually he couldn't ignore the morning any further, especially as the noises below picked up in volume. Adrian could hear shouting from the landings below, although he ignored them in favor of getting dressed quickly. He always found getting dressed the most difficult action of any morning, something about adorning clothing seemed so...fundamentally pointless, and exhausting to him.

Adrian hesitated once before grabbing the locket and slipping it over his head, it rested warmly over his heart.

"Time to go?" Lutain asked quizzically, sliding free from his enchanted box as Adrian stacked it on top of his chest.

"I think so," Adrian hummed to himself, tidying up his bed and snatching the one soft blanket he was attached to more so than the others.

He opened the door, scooting his heavy trunk out his door frame and in front of Remus'. The man was likely busy figuring out the final security detail that would follow Skylar, although the man was adamant that *he* would be accompanying Adrian.

Hedwig gave a small cry, clicking her sharp beak as she looked at her cage in disdain. She would much rather fly ahead, or pester Mundungus.

"Adrian!" Tonks whooped, peering upwards from the very very bottom of the stairs, "I'll get that trunk for you!"

"I like her," Lutain noted happily, *"She shifted hair to look like my scales."*

"Did she really?" Adrian asked his familiar, stroking his back. It wasn't a strange sight for Adrian to talk to his snake after all.

"Yes," Lutain hummed happily, *"It looked horrible."*

Tonks stumbled up the stairs, nearly tripping over the disgruntled Crookshanks. She pointed her wand with her tongue sticking out in concentration, carefully levitating the trunk over the railing and down the stairwell with calm movements.

With all the chaos, Mrs. Black's portrait was howling with rage.

"Adrian!" Remus smiled from below, dressed in a thick brown outer robe to fend off the September chill, "Come along! We're leaving first!"

Likely to avoid arriving with the Potter's and everyone else, and to save whatever reputation he had left. Adrian thanked Remus mentally a dozen times over.

Hedwig cried out sharply, rattling her wings on the small cage as she was stuffed inside. Lutain laughed over her dismay, before protesting himself about going into his crate.

"No! Not fair!" He whined, tail thrashing as Adrian stuffed him elbow deep into the enchanted box, *"Treachery!"*

"Shut up," Adrian muttered in good nature, locking the box shut from the outside. It wouldn't do for Lutain to get lost accidently in the chaos of King's Cross.

They approached the front door, Remus levitating the trunks behind them. The moment they stepped outside, the loud sounds vanished behind them, leaving them in the dreary September sunlight and the empty muggle road.

"We'll apparate to the station, it'll take less time." Remus explained, holding out his one arm politely.

An old lady with grey curled hair watched them shrewdly across the street. Then she winked once, grey hair shifting to neon blue before back to grey. She gave a subtle wave, before carrying on in a hunched walk.

With a disorienting squeezing sensation, they appeared in an entirely new sort of chaos. Adrian was thankful Lutain was hidden well in his box, he could easily imagine his lengthy familiar getting splinched.

Hedwig shrieked angrily, rattling her cage once again as she spotted a grey cat on a leash, walking next to one young witch.

"Well, look after yourself." Remus spoke, carefully impersonal as he offered his hand for a handshake.

Adrian smiled slightly, knowing that the relief in his eyes was visible. "You too."

"Keep your head down and your eyes peeled," Remus noted, giving a tiny wave to the irritated Hedwig, "Careful what you put in writing, but I'll be glad to owl you back and forth."

Adrian gave a small nod, grabbing his trunk with one hand and Hedwig with the other, "I'll see you around, Remus."

Remus nodded back, "Until then, cub."

Adrian blinked quickly and started walking, slipping onto the train and tugging his trunk after him. Once the trunk (and Lutain) made it up the several steep steps, he hoisted Hedwig onto the top of the mess and dragged all three containers behind him.

The frosted glass of the compartments were open, showing the collection of students inside. Adrian knew better than to even *try* to sit with anyone not in Slytherin, and even those inside Slytherin were tentative at best.

He found an empty compartment, mostly due to how early he arrived. He slid Hedwig into a special owl carrier on the top of the compartment, as well as his trunks. He dutifully unlocked the small latch and let Lutain free.

The black snake dropped from the ceiling with a dull *thwack!* Instantly, he sprawled out on the opposite seat, soaking up the dull sunshine and expressing in grumbles how *annoyed* he was. Hedwig cooed alongside, as if able to understand him.

Of course, his compartment wasn't empty forever.

"Hello, Adrian." Luna smiled, lugging her own trunk into the compartment. She struggled to hoist it, shifting and pushing the trunk until it slid into place next to Adrian's. "Oh, hello Lutain. You've grown, it suits you."

"Hello crazy lady," Lutain dutifully responded, not bothering to move. Lutain would never admit it, but he found it amusing how Luna talked to him as if she understood his language.

Luna hummed quietly to herself as she closed the compartment door, and then picked up Lutain's lower body to slide underneath him onto a seat. Once seated, she let the scaly lower half plop back onto her lap.

Lutain looked at her in surprise, and amusement over her generally uncaring attitude.

Adrian smiled, and glanced out of the window once more.

"How was your summer?" Luna asked curiously. "You look terrible."

"You know, most times you're supposed to compliment me first." Adrian dryly commented, "It's wonderful to know you're so sweet."

Luna shrugged, "You look like something's eating you."

Adrian rolled his eyes with a small affectionate quirk to his lips, "Is it the Blibbering Humdingers or the Snorkacks this time?"

Luna just smiled sadly, and pulled out a version of the Quibbler to read. It was upside down, although Adrian had no doubt she could read it fluently.

The train whistled and began to move. Adrian was hopeful that it would be just them inside the compartment.

The door opened just as the train was pulling out of the station, Skylar Potter and Neville Longbottom looking equally hopeful and rejected.

Adrian groaned and banged his head back on the wall behind him, "Merlin, I *just* got rid of you."

"Don't be mean," Luna tutted, smiling dazed at the newcomers, "Hello."

"Er, hi?" Skylar stated, staring at Luna a bit longer than necessary. Her hair was just as long as before, if only a bit more straggly. Luna *did* have an aura of distinct dottiness, either from her butterbeer cap necklace, or how her wand was jammed behind her left ear for safekeeping.

"You're Skylar Potter," She noted, tilting her head curiously. Skylar blinked, taken aback by the statement as if his identity was something to be debated. "Er, yes. I know I am."

Neville chuckled and tried to take a seat next to Luna, only to jump to his feet in alarm when Lutain reared angrily with a hiss. He hadn't noticed how Lutain had sprawled lazily across the entire bench seat and Luna's lap, staking a claim.

"Shhh," She soothed Lutain with a small bop to his snout, "Don't be rude. I don't know who you are."

"I'm nobody," Neville hurriedly explained.

"No you're not," Skylar frowned, "He's Neville Longbottom, he's in my year."

"Oh, hello." Luna smiled slightly, although her expression wasn't entirely welcoming, "I'm Luna Lovegood."

She raised her copy of the Quibbler high enough to hide her face, and fell silent. Adrian had his eyes closed and head resting on the headrest, all in all Neville and Skylar were very uncomfortable. It was very clear that although the two new passengers were free to stay, they weren't being exactly encouraged.

The train rattled onward, speeding into open country. It was an odd, unsettled sort of day; one moment the carriage was full of sunlight and the next they were passing beneath ominously gray clouds.

"Guess what I got for my birthday?" said Neville.

"Don't care." Adrian promptly replied, causing Neville to flush and lower his backpack. Skylar swallowed uncomfortably, ready to reprimand Adrian for how rude that had been. Adrian didn't look as if he had even *realized* it was rude. Once again, Skylar felt sad at the differences between Adrian and other people - the gaps where social norms and actions hadn't quite sunk into him. It was...Skylar didn't know how to explain it.

The compartment opened nearly an hour later, by then the trolley had already gone by. Lutain was energetically hunting a chocolate frog, lunging back and forth to direct the thing into his coils. He was careful not to bite the chocolate creation.

The door slid open just as the frog leapt out into the hall. Lutain leapt after it, grabbing it in his coils and wrapping tightly around it until he was a well formed knot at the end of a black rope. Adrian grabbed his tail and dragged him back inside the compartment as if a dog toy.

"Sorry uh, bad time?" Ron blinked, already stowing his small energetic owl Pigwidgeon next to the angry Hedwig. He threw himself into the seat next to Skylar, sandwiching him between the ginger and Adrian.

Hermione stomped inside and settled herself next to Neville, looking more dignified although more uncertain of Lutain rolling around near their feet.

"Well, there are two fifth-year prefects from each House," said Hermione, looking thoroughly disgruntled, "Boy and girl from each."

"Who is Slytherin?" Adrian asked curiously, not bothering to open his eyes.

"Malfoy," Skylar responded instantly, sounding as if he accepted the fate already.

"And that complete *cow* Pansy Parkinson." Hermione seethed, "Er, I mean, if you're friends with her-"

"She's thicker than a concussed troll." Adrian snorted sourly, "Greengrass would have been better, though thank *Merlin* she isn't."

"Uh," Neville smartly responded, not knowing the Slytherins that well.

"Who's Hufflepuff?" Skylar asked.

"Ernie Macmillan and Hannah Abbott." said Ron sourly. Adrian groaned quietly at Ernie.

"Anthony Goldstein and Padma Patil for Ravenclaw," Hermione added in.

"You went to Yule Ball with Padma Patil," Luna bluntly and tactlessly stated, looking at Skylar as if he was going to refute the fact.

"I did," Skylar blinked surprised, not at all denying it, "who did you go with?"

Luna *beamed,* "Adrian."

There was a small pause, a hesitation in breath from almost everyone in the compartment. Adrian

didn't open his eyes, and breathing resumed slowly, cautiously.

"Oh!" Hermione looked happy with the conversation, "Yes! I remember that!"

Ron blinked, "Well I don't."

There was another heavy pause. Although Adrian's eyes were closed he could almost *feel* how eyes were flickering from his form to Luna and back.

Skylar sounded uncomfortable, "Oh, er...are you two…"

Adrian opened his eyes and looked at Skylar with a deadpan expression, Luna simply looked inquisitive. Skylar trailed off weakly, not finishing his sentence and struggling to rephrase.

"Are we what?" Luna's tone was gentle and neutral, yet somehow sharper and daring. Metaphorically poking a inquirious wyvern with a pointy stick.

Skylar's mouth opened and he floundered, unable to ask anything besides an awkward wheezing noise.

"We're supposed to patrol the corridors every so often!" Ron blurted, stopping the escalating unease with his sudden outburst. At once, the atmosphere cracked and everyone relaxed into their seats.

"Obviously, since you know, you're a *prefect,"* Adrian sighed, looking very fed up with the conversation and chatter already.

Then the compartment door opened for the third time.

Skylar had been expecting it, but it did not make the sight of Draco Malfoy smirking at him from between Crabbe and Goyle any more pleasant. It was small mercies that Malfoy hadn't appeared only minutes prior.

"What?" Skylar asked aggressively, before Malfoy could open his mouth. Malfoy seemed stunned for a split second, as if he had anticipated someone else being inside the compartment.

Adrian's lip twitched, he hadn't seen many of Potter's fights with Malfoy in person, although they were known school wide.

"Manners, Potter, or I'll have to give you a detention," drawled Malfoy, who was barely restraining his glee, "You see, *I,* unlike you, have been made a prefect which means that I, unlike you, have the power to hand out punishments."

"Yeah, but *you,* unlike me, are a git."

Adrian almost snorted. Lutain sniggered silently.

"Tell me, how does it feel being second-best to Weasley, Potter?" Malfoy asked, lip curling in amusement. His tone was bitingly sharp, none of the fancy dainty duels of wits Adrian had experienced in the common room. This was mean and blunt.

"Shut up, Malfoy." Hermione spoke sharply.

"I seem to have touched a nerve," Malfoy huffed happily, smirking sharply, "Well, watch yourself- *Selwyn?"*

Adrian groaned, and banged his head back on the wall behind him. So much for small mercies.

Malfoy blinked in surprise once, then was overwhelmed by laughter so strong, tears slipped down his face.

"It's *true!"* He cackled in mirth, "You really *were* with that filthy werewolf!"

Adrian felt the locket against his heart vibrate, pulsing sharply and fueling his rising anger. Why couldn't Malfoy just leave him *alone.*

He recognized realistically that there was no need to get so...so *furious.* Malfoy was just being his usual jerk self, and he would leave and most likely tease him for it later.

But Adrian was angry, he really was. More furious than he had been with Mundungus in the past. He wanted to make Malfoy *hurt.*

"Hi Malfoy!" He spoke, voice chipper in a way that signified an approaching hurricane. He had his wand in his sleeve, and in the practiced movement Bellatrix had *drilled* into him, it slipped into his hand with one go.

Skylar inhaled sharply at his words. Skylar could remember almost instantly the same sort of chipper- nearly *giggly* tone of voice, as well as the leaking visceral stuffings of an old couch.

Skylar hurried forward, barely able to lean across before Adrian was pointing his wand with something *delighted* in his eyes. Lutain took some sort of invisible cue and *lunged* at the Slytherin trio. Crabbe and Goyle flinched back with an ugly expression of dismay.

"Incendio!" Adrian hissed, flicking his wand to target Draco's robes.

He intended only for a decently small segment to burn. Lutain had to recoil and retreat backwards as not only *Draco* caught on fire, but *also* Crabbe and Goyle. Draco's entire outer robe went up in orange flames, tongues lapping happily and spreading to the boy's hair as the patches on his cronies' robes spread over their back. A contained flame was quickly turning wild, sending off acrid black smoke as it burned through expensive silk and other materials.

Adrian startled in surprise, he certainly hadn't intended for an effect *that* strong.

'The potion…' He remembered in awe, Crouch *had* said that his magic would be stronger.

Adrian felt a grin split his face as Malfoy and his goons screamed in surprise and fear, skin turning pink then a vicious angry red. There was a strange disturbing cooked smell, mixing with the harsh smoke.

A bubbling laugh tumble from Adrian's mouth. The potion *worked.*

What more did the potion do?

Adrian's peripheral vision blurred as his blood pulsed quickly through his neck, the locket burning warm enough to *almost* be uncomfortable. He could feel his pulse all the way down to his finger tips, vibrating rhythmically. He pushed- as if trying to break through a permeable membrane, like a firm soap bubble.

He pushed, and pushed until his focus point stretched and warped- his hearing drowning out behind the pulsating *thud-dud, thud-dud thud-dud*

Then it snapped.

Boom

The flames *roared,* leaping upwards with the fury of an entire bucket of floo powder in a fireplace. The flames glowed red, licking and burning the top of the hallway and dancing off of the frosted glass and along the corridor down at least two carpet smoldered, peeling away from the wooden flooring like a leaf drying out. The wallpaper of the carriages curled like flower petals and waxy glue dripped as if the train was bleeding.

A sharp pain slammed into Adrian's face; his focus was broken as he stumbled back and raised both hands instinctively to clutch his nose.

Adrian stumbled back, blinking wildly as he noticed suddenly how *hot* everything was. And the screaming.

Hermione was casting something desperately, chest heaving as Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle were lying pitifully and moaning quietly in the middle of the hallway, *still* on fire.

"Hermione?" Skylar breathed in horror, unsure of what to think.

"I- Flame-freezing charm," she gasped out, shaking in horror, "I- Flitwick made me do an essay last year."

Luna hurried to her feet, approaching the fire tentatively before reaching into it and feeling the pitifully mewling trio. She withdrew her hand slowly, skin untouched and unharmed although she did have a rather large frown on her face. "Ron, Hermione, could you fetch the Head Boy and Head Girl?"

"I- yes!" Hermione blubbered, flinching as the flames snapped angrily, crackling out as if snapping its jaws.

They could hear people shouting and taking cover in the compartments directly nearby, people were racing down the hallways and struggling to dispel the large fire. There was a shrill alarm, ringing painfully in Adrian's ears.

Adrian trembled, blinking wildly as the locket thrummed wildly against his chest. Hissing wordless praise like a proud mother.

"Adrian!" Hermione shouted, causing Adrian to flinch and look at her suddenly.

"I- yeah?" He croaked, blinking still as he seemed dazed. Luna slipped between Hermione and Skylar, folding her legs under her to trail her fingers gently along Adrian's jawline.

Ron looked particularly shaken, all the blood having drained from his face. The redhead was staring at something lower than Adrian's eyes; Adrian lifted a hand to his face, pulling away when his fingers were stained in blood and his face throbbed sore.

"Ron punched you," Skylar informed him, looking visibly shaken as well, "You okay? You with us?"

"Master?" Lutain asked quietly, curled up tightly and protectively over where Luna had been sitting.

"Adrian?" Luna asked, although her voice was sharper and clearer in the ringing haze.

"I- yeah." Adrian stumbled, feeling like he was talking underwater, "I- did I hurt you?"

Lutain lowered his head, resting it on his coils as he dutifully unraveled, showing tarnished scales that seemed a bit more black than usual.

Adrian's heart dropped.

"We're fine, I think." Luna assured him calmly, "I think that Draco Malfoy is hurt. As well as Crabbe and Goyle."

"Good." Adrian rasped out, blinking and flinching back in alarm when Ron's face shadowed in anger. His fist had pulled back, twitching into another punch. Luna hunkered forward slightly, shielding Adrian's trembling body with her own petite one.

"Yeah well," Skylar soothed, shaking from adrenaline as the fire continued to burn, thankfully impossible to feel, "they'll take care of this. The fire."

Adrian nodded rapidly, feeling whiplash. Adrian rasped something, unable to hear his own voice although he felt his mouth move in the shape of words. Luna tilted her head, nodding slightly before standing and reaching above everyone's heads. She had to balance on the tips of her toes, yanking at Adrian's classier trunk. It fell with a clatter, startling Hedwig and Pigwidgeon who were shivering from the scare.

"I- healing potions." Adrian swallowed, voice foreign in his own ears. He opened the compartment, snatching a half dozen hastily. Luna gently slipped them from between his unresponsive fingers, passing them along to Hermione. She kept one, likely for the sluggishly bleeding from Adrian's nose.

The fire outside was finally extinguished, thanks to several students rushing forward with water charms. The corridor and compartment felt musty, incredibly humid and damp from the water. Draco and his goons were escorted away by the Head boy and Head girl, already being treated with charms and potions to prevent the snitch sized blisters from forming. The train scooted along, resuming its original path. Of course, both the Head boy and girl had investigated thoroughly- they sighed in frustration the moment they spotted Selwyn, shaking slightly in the furthest corner of the compartment. Fire incidents went almost hand and hand with Adrian Selwyn. Skylar felt a small pang of anger- it wasn't *fair* that they had leapt to assumptions without even asking questions!

(He felt bad instantly after, given that the situation *was* due to the common assumption. Selwyn was a very unlucky bloke.)

The weather remained poor as they traveled farther and farther north. Rain spattered the windows, almost ironically with how muggy the train cars now felt. When darkness fell and lamps came back on inside the carriages, Luna rolled up her magazine and took to looking at Lutain who was still curled up protectively.

"Episkey," she cast carefully, gently attempting to repair the damaged scales. Trevor the toad croaked quietly.

"We'd better change," said Hermione at last, still glancing at Adrian with worry. Adrian was curled in on himself, staring out of the grimy window as if he couldn't see anything at all. He was painfully small, pressed in the gap between Luna and the window.

At last the train began to slow down, and they heard the usual racket up and down as everyone scrambled to get their luggage and pets assembled.

Ron and Hermione prepared to leave, Hermione pausing as she quietly gave Adrian permission to skip the opening feast in favor of seeing Madam Pomfrey. He shrugged and ignored her, Luna pressed closer to him as if her weight and pressure would help reassure him.

The group shuffled out of the compartment, smelling the unusually sulfuric air as they avoided larger patches of still smoldering carpet. Adrian ducked his head low, trying to avoid the judgmental whispers when a few students spotted him leaving the smoking corridor. Slowly they moved toward the door, trying not to pay that much attention to how other students began murmuring to one another over the burnt smell.

They made their way towards the hundred or so horseless stagecoaches. The ground was wet and soggy, mud and wet trees making a familiar sappy smell; petrichor. The square shape of the carriages slowly emerged from the dark, familiar in shape except the new addition. Skylar gasped loudly, pausing and dragging the group to a halt.

One monster peered over curiously, huffing through large nostrils and sightless eyes. Their hairless skin reflected light waxily, something dark yet the strange shininess of a scar.

Adrian relaxed when he spotted the familiarity of the skeletal creature, and vast, black leathery wings. Skylar nearly gaped, noticing instantly how the other boy was much more lively and content in the presence of such...*monsters.* The others didn't seem to notice at all, as if they were *invisible.*

"What are those things?" Skylar nodded towards the horse creatures, trying not to stare too much with how reverently Adrian was sending glances towards them.

Adrian paused, wilting in on himself slightly. Adrian was holding Lutain tightly as he clipped out, "what things?"

The fact that Adrian was the one to respond drew more attention to the question that Skylar asked than originally intended. Skylar shrunk in on himself, lamely pointing with one hand.

"Those horse-..."

Luna appeared once more in the dark, eyes wide and almost as grey as the beasts. They had somewhat split away from the main group, lagging behind. "There you are, shall we get in now?"

"What were you saying, Sky?" Ron grumbled, opening the carriage door and shoving Pigwidgeon's cage inside.

"I was saying, what are those horse things?"

"What horse things?" Hermione piped up, emerging from Skylar's otherside behind a group of excited second years.

"The horse things pulling the carriages!" Skylar snapped impatiently; they were, after all, about three feet from the nearest one it was watching them with empty white eyes.

Ron just looked at Skylar perplexed.

"Thestrals," Adrian spoke quietly, walking past the trio directly towards the horse creature. He reached out, running one hand over the reptilian face and the bony snout. Skylar felt like flinching away, something seemed so...grotesque with touching the strangely reptilian monster. The thestral leaned into the touch without care, peering out with the eyes of a corpse.

"What?" Hermione huffed, too tense and high strung from Adrian's earlier outburst.

Adrian let his hand fall, dangling by the thestral's cheek before he lowered it to his waist.

"It's all right," Luna spoke quietly, vanishing into the coach's interior, "You're not going mad. I can see them too."

That wasn't very reassuring, if anything it made Skylar more uncomfortable. These...these strange demonic horses that were invisible to everyone except them.

Adrian huffed quietly, coming out of his shell. He almost smiled at how unsettled Skylar felt, "You're just as unfortunate as we are."

Hysteria

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian dislikes Umbridge, is terrified of Thestrals, turns into an Animal, and has a Mental Breakdown

Chapter Notes

Double chapter!

'I didn't mean to. I think that's the worst bit. I honestly didn't mean for that to happen, It's like trying to keep sand from falling between your fingers. It's too much, it's always too much. The worst bit, the worst bit is that I know nobody believes that either.'

"Well, now that we are all digesting another magnificent feast, I beg a few moments of your attention for the usual start-of-term notices. Before, I would like to apologize for the unimaginable fire, which broke out on the Hogwarts Express while arriving. Be assured, that we are investigating it as we speak. First years ought to know that the forest in the grounds is out of bounds to students."

"Mr. Filch, our caretaker, has asked me once more to remind you all that magic is not permitted in the corridors. We have two changes in staff this year. We are pleased to welcome back Professor Grubbly-Plank, who will be taking care of Care of Magical Creatures. We are also pleased to introduce Professor Umbridge, our new Defense Against the Dark Art teacher."

"Tryouts for the House Quidditch teams will take place on the-"

Dumbledore broke off, looking inquiringly at Professor Umbridge. As she was not much taller standing than sitting, there was a moment when nobody understood why she had *remained* standing.

Dumbledore only looked taken aback for a moment, then he sat back down smartly and looked alertly at Professor Umbridge as if she was to declare an important announcement.

"Thank you, Headmaster," Professor Umbridge smiled much too sweet, "for those kind words of welcome. Well, It is lovely to be back at Hogwarts, I must say! And to see such happy little faces looking back at me! The Ministry of Magic has always considered the education of young witches and wizards to be of *vital* importance…"

"Would you like to explain to me what happened, Mr. Selwyn?" Madam Pomfrey asked gently.

Adrian shifted, his jaw visibly tense. "I tried to spell Malfoy. It was a bigger reaction than I thought it would be."

Madam Pomfrey sighed through her nose, "I'll say," She smiled, trying to keep the conversation

light and easy.

Adrian's face twitched.

"What spell did you use?" She asked politely, taking out a sheaf of parchment and a quill, already documenting the occasion. Adrian recognized his box, already filled with his extensive medical records. Adrian suspected that Remus was sending letters ahead of time, keeping her updated on his medical information.

"Incendio," Adrian muttered quietly, running his fingers over his wand. Madam Pomfrey paused, looking at him considerately.

"That was a big reaction for a basic spell, Mr. Selwyn."

Adrian shrugged, "It just happened."

Unfortunately, the few eye witnesses had confirmed that it *was* the spell Adrian had used. There were records of Adrian's special usage of fire charms or spells, it was possible that he simply performed pyrotechnic magic a hair better than others. Affinities were usually for a branch of magic, like healing spells or charms or transfiguration. The idea that fire magic was an affinity was...unusual, but not uncommon.

"Well, I have a few new questions to ask you," She smiled, taking out the new sheaf of parchment where she had written down questions earlier, "Can you give me a number? One for never, five for all the time?"

Adrian rolled his eyes, looking as if he had better things to do.

"Now, are you very anxious about a lot of things in your life?"

Adrian glared with a withering look, "No."

"The numbers, Mr. Selwyn."

Adrian paused, tensing and curling his feet on top of the bed, "two,"

She wrote it down dutifully.

"Do you feel that your worry is out of your control?"

Adrian snorted, looking bored already, "One."

"Are you restless, agitated, or tense?"

Adrian paused, looking considerate while chewing on his bottom lip. His cheek twitched, Poppy held her breath.

"...five."

"Do you have trouble sleeping? Or oversleeping?"

"...four."

They continued, Madam Pomfrey alternated between asking other questions about if his heart rate would speed up, or if he ever tremble excessively. It went on for a painfully long time, enough for Madam Pomfrey to feel very unsure and uncomfortable with some of the responses of the child.

"Are we done?" he growled out, looking irritable and unsettled.

"Yes, we are." Madam Pomfrey smiled; unsure, setting aside the parchment and his responses. Adrian leapt to his feet, stretching his back and looking ready to leave.

"Mr. Selwyn?" Madam Pomfrey asked politely, "If you'd like, I can write a note to your Head of House about your condition?"

Adrian tensed, "What condition?"

Pomfrey struggled, "You...You've experienced a traumatic event, and sometimes events leave us with sc-"

Adrian looked at her with the greatest deadpan expression.

Madam Pomfrey flushed and bit her tongue. Of *course* he knew about scars, physical or emotional.

"Thank you, but it's not necessary." He smiled sharply, "have a good evening, Ma'am."

Poppy sighed, locking up Adrian's record once more.

Adrian left hurriedly towards the Great Hall, his stomach twisting into something pained. They were to receive their scheduled classes, although they likely would only walk around to find the specific rooms today. Classes begin tomorrow, as per tradition.

Adrian shuffled into the Great Hall, sliding towards the Slytherin table and taking a seat. Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle were nowhere to be seen. The 'fire incident' had spread like, well, wildfire through the house. Everyone speculated it was Adrian who set it.

With a whoosh and a clatter, hundreds of owls came soaring in through the upper windows. They descended all over the Hall, bringing letters and packages to their owners and showering the breakfast eaters with droplets of water; it was clearly raining very hard outside. Hedwig swooped down low, her long white wings curved sharply as she landed right in front of Adrian, shaking water off of her back. She had a letter tied to her leg, low quality parchment he knew Remus liked to use.

Adrian grimaced and untied it, storing it in his pocket to read later.

A loud flash of lightning filled the room, seconds later it rattled the table with thunder.

It was a thunderstorm.

A *thunderstorm.*

Adrian scrambled upwards from his table, snatching his schedule from a highly annoyed Snape as he hurried down to the dungeons. He briefly glanced at his schedule, wincing as he noticed just how horrid it was. He was so busy with Crouch last year, he hadn't constructed that convenient of a schedule. His classes were poorly spaced, and overwhelming on certain days.

It didn't matter, he had better things to do anyways.

He hurried down to his room, closing the door behind him to search through all of his potions for the one bottle in particular that was unmarked. He grabbed it, peering inside at the one mandrake leaf he had adhered to the underside of his tongue for a month. He could run down to the chamber to undergo the transformation in ultimate privacy, but something about the seclusion wasn't

appealing. It was incredibly unlikely that anyone would intrude on him inside his room- the door was locked, Lutain was on guard, and everyone dedicated the day to exploring the castle or relaxing. It was the best time *now.*

It was very anticlimactic. Adrian twisted the topper off and chugged the entire blood red vial, pausing only to shift the leaf around in his mouth so he wouldn't choke. After a moment of hesitation, he chewed the leaf and swallowed it along with the potion. The edges of the leaf were still sharp, and burned his throat as if it were broken glass.

Nothing happened, not for ten minutes. Not for fifteen. Adrian pouted, sitting on his bed quietly as he set his wand on his nightstand and stared at the wall.

A fiery pain erupted through his body, leaving him gasping and keeling over. His heart raced, beating faster and faster until- until it *split,* an intense double heartbeat that was much slower than his own one.

He opened his mouth, trying to speak or at least warn Lutain. Before he could do so- the room vanished, his eyes rolling up into his head as something scaled with yellow-green eyes stared at him milky, jaw unhinging and…

Adrian jolted his eyes open, everything stunningly surreal with a double vision. He twitched, struggling to move as his arms were *broken…*

He moved, oh- *oh,* he didn't *have* arms. He lifted his head like he was looking up, his neck extending and flexing as he just rose and rose and *rose-*

He groaned, the noise sounded warped and audible as something ringing, a thrum from a plucked string.

'How do I move?' He thought dazed to himself, struggling and wiggling in place like Lutain stuck in a mouse trap.

Thank Merlin his familiar wasn't out to see it.

He struggled, finally propelling forward shakily by tensing and pushing each side as if he was swimming. It was scarily easy to adapt, especially when he could lift or lower his upper body so easily.

Within moments he was thoroughly investigating his room, flicking out his tongue curiously only to flinch at the 'second' afterimage that burned through his mind. As if someone had flashed lumos brightly in his skull.

"Oh Merlin," He moaned, his voice hoarse but clearly audible to his own ears (or ear holes?)

He spotted movement, turning and lifting as something else rose also- he struggled to match it length for length.

'Attack! Attack!' something primitive hissed, compelling him to flex and sway his exposed underbelly in a dizzying pattern. His teeth clicked with a silent but noticeable snap, each lowering like a fist unfurling.

He blinked (he didn't think snakes *could* blink) and tilted his head in confusion at the long black enemy, *"Lutain?"*

His opponent pulled back, towering a solid foot above him although its body was much more

slender. It tasted the air, a long whiplike tongue which moved much faster than Adrian could, *"Master?"*

Adrian stumbled, trying to lower himself slowly to the ground, only accomplishing a very human trip backwards, knocking his head on the corner of his bed. His body hit the floor with a dull *thwap!*

Lutain stared, then snickered wildly in amusement, *"Master! You are noble kind! You have such large scales!"*

Adrian stumbled to right himself, *"How in the blazes do you use your tongue?"*

Lutain wisely flicked his tongue twice, and didn't answer.

Adrian looked around curiously once more, his tail instinctively twitching and curling like a prehensile thumb around the very edge of his bed.

"You have pretty scales," Lutain noted wisely, *"Like Nagini."*

Adrian could tell that was true, his sense of size was thoroughly shot to hell but Lutain's own scales were much much smaller. Although his familiar was longer in comparison.

"Oh Merlin, it's filthy in here. I need to clean under my bed more often," Adrian commented, investigating under his bed and hearing the scrape of scales on wood.

Something tugged on his head, providing resistance. He yanked his head back, freeing himself from a dangling tail of one of his sheets. Lutain watched bemused as Adrian investigated, trying to understand how on earth the sheet got stuck to his face.

"This is confusing," Adrian admitted, thankful that his familiar could at least understand him.

"Can you go back?" Lutain asked curiously, hoisting himself onto the bed. Adrian attempted to follow, it was much *much* harder than he thought it would be.

He struggled upwards, learning quickly that he did *not* have as fine muscular control as Nagini did when climbing. Once thoroughly exhausted, he collapsed on his covers on top of his clothing and the locket he had abandoned.

In theory, he should be able to change at will back to his human form just by envisioning it. He didn't think it would be that easy.

It was.

He blinked, swaying dizzily as his senses oriented himself as well as his depth perception once more. He felt nauseous, obviously he'd need to practice.

"That was exciting." Lutain pointed out happily, overjoyed beyond words. Adrian blinked, fisting the clothing he had abandoned.

"I need to figure out how to shift without losing my robes," he thought smartly, feeling cripplingly exhausted. He slipped on his outer robe, abandoning his underclothing simply for convenience.

Lutain was positively *thrilled* for the next few days, refusing to leave Adrian alone. He prattled on and on about all of the finer things he would teach Adrian, from the fastest way to strike to how to pick out the best rat from a pile. Adrian tried to follow, although the physical transformation truly

had taken everything out of him. He felt like something had grabbed his bones and *stretched* him, even his eyes hurt.

He knew that a proper Animagus transformation took attributes and applied them both ways. James Potter had a habit of tossing his head, or leaping across areas without thought. Sirius tilted his head when puzzled, and had his trademark bark-like laugh.

Adrian could only guess his scars had traveled over to his animagus form. He was *very* curious what had traveled back.

He was in contact with his father every other night, speaking through disjointed phrases through his tattoo. Once Adrian had fallen asleep, Lutain carried on the conversation except this time with Nagini.

Things were looking up, except for the horrid experience that was Defense class. Adrian was struggling to stay focused enough to read textbook, let alone read lines. The only thing which made the class tolerable was in his boredom, he tended to smolder the Professor's books or parchment when she wasn't looking. His classmates caught on quickly, and although Draco, Crabbe and Goyle had *not* forgiven him for the train incident, they at least found it slightly humorous as well.

It was good practice, not to mention very tricky to only singe a book instead of full out burning it. Adrian had his wand in his bag even, so as much as Professor Umbridge would *love* to blame him, she didn't have a target.

(With how often Adrian zoned out and refused to read the assigned passages, Umbridge had tauntingly stated that he must be illiterate. Adrian barely blinked, which infuriated her even further.)

Double transfiguration for some reason seemed much, *much* easier. They started with vanishing spells, each given snails. On the fifth attempt, the snail simply winked out of existence. Greengrass of course accomplished it one try before him, but the class ended with no other student successful.

Normally Adrian would be excited for Care, but for some reason it just didn't seem important to him. He didn't mind it, although he was curious whatever happened to Hagrid.

"Everyone here?" barked Professor Grubbly-Plank, "Let's crack on then- who can tell me what these things are called?"

She indicated to the heap of twigs in front of her. Hermione's hand shot into the air only a second after Adrian realized what they were. Small wood creatures with knobbly brown arms and legs, two twig-like fingers, and a funny flat barklike face. Professor Grubbly-Plank blinked as she saw Hermione, then peered around at the rest of the class. It was common knowledge that Hermione could answer nearly every question, regardless of class.

"So, anyone know the names of these creatures?"

The Slytherins collectively looked at Adrian, and took a double take at how he was barely even paying attention. They exchanged alarmed glances, realizing that Granger was going to get the answer.

"Miss Granger?"

"Bowtruckles," said Hermione, "They're tree-guardians that usually live in wand trees!"

"Five points for Gryffindor," said Professor Grubbly-Plank, "Yes, these are bowtruckles and, as

Miss Granger rightly says, they generally live in trees. Anybody know what they eat?"

Once again, the Slytherins looked at Adrian, who wasn't paying attention. Lutain was hissing something, and Adrian was amusing himself with playing with his familiar.

"Woodlice! But fairy eggs if they can get them."

"Good girl, take another five points. So whenever you need leaves or wood from-..."

"What the hell, Selwyn?" Blaise hissed angrily, nostrils flaring in annoyance, "Get us some points."

Adrian rolled his eyes and scoffed, "Oh yes, like I want to waste my time on bowtruckles and five lousy points."

Blaise looked like he had been slapped. Pansy made a small sound of confusion.

"Go on! Grab one!" the Professor beckoned. They each methodologically approached, Adrian taking the flank of the line.

The moment he approached the pile though, the bowtruckles *screamed,* running away and burrowing as far as they could get from Adrian.

"Mr. Selwyn!" Professor Grubbly-Plank abruptly stated, "Remove that, that reptile from the area immediately!"

Adrian paused and looked at her as if they had insulted his family, but obligingly picked up the snake and set it loose. The snake paused, but obediently slithered away towards the castle.

The bowtruckles were still terrified. Adrian ignored them and reached out, the creatures scrambled away from his open hand as if he was a dementor. One stood tall and growled, jumping at him and *biting* his finger.

Adrian hissed, the sound would have made Slytherin proud. Even Draco would say that noise was *perfect.*

Adrian glared at the bowtruckle angrily, the bowtruckle froze.

"Well," The professor awkwardly stated, "I, ah, I heard you were good with the creatures. That's unfortunate, partner up and use someone else's."

Adrian scowled and simply went to sit on the grass on his own. They were to draw a bowtruckle, but Adrian seemed to be doing fine on his own.

When the bell echoed distantly over the grounds, Adrian rolled up his accurate bowtruckle picture and marched off. Skylar Potter stared at him unsure, heading towards the greenhouses. Hermione and Ron followed quickly, sneaking glares at Malfoy. It didn't even resonate with Adrian that it *was* rather odd that he wasn't fascinated by the bowtruckles in the slightest.

"You're right," Adrian agreed contently, *"These pipes are amazing."*

Lutain continued on in the lead, having traveled through the pipe system much more than he had.

"Yes! They go to every room!" Lutain enthused, *"I watch whenever."*

Adrian tilted his head curiously, chasing the white ghostly figure that he could see in the pitch black darkness. *"Are you saying you've snuck around to watch me?"*

"Yes, but not the potions. They smell bad." Lutain grimaced, sounding disgusted as he banked left at a fork, his long body traversing the pipe.

Adrian was skeptic of the pipes at first, assuming that they would be much too large to sufficiently sneak around. Slytherin must have been an animagus himself, since the pipes magically altered sizes to allow Adrian to slip through without too much difficulty,

"I can imagine. Where are we going?"

"Where do you want?" Lutain responded challengingly, allowing Adrian to take the lead and go exploring.

Adrian reasoned that he was somewhere in between Nagini and Lutain. Longer than Nagini, although considerably less stocky. He wasn't nearly as flexible as her, or with her level of muscle control. Lutain was disproportionately long, thin and *fast.* Adrian wasn't anything like that, although he could *blink* which was already weird. From what he had seen of his body, he had relatively large scales (or Lutain just had unusually small ones), and was a dark black color, almost iridescent blue and green in specific lighting. He didn't know what his head looked like, he hadn't the opportunity to find a mirror.

They moved down another pipe, the walls expanding to accommodate turning around. Adrian was getting the hang of slithering, although it frequently left him with incredibly sore sides the next day.

Adrian *explored,* happily moving down and up and left and right through the pipes, eyes able to pierce the darkness well. In the reflections of the pipe, he had spotted the vaguest shape of a strange fringed crest, starting between his eyes and back over the flat of his skull like the dorsal spine on a fish. It was red on the membranes between, striking to look at when extended but a hazard to bedsheets. Perhaps he was aquatic?

Adrian truly didn't care much for Quidditch. The only relief was that with the new season, Adrian had enough time on his own to explore around the pipes with Lutain.

It was a welcome stress relief, something he genuinely enjoyed doing. Lutain enjoyed it also, especially since they hadn't ever the opportunity to do something similar before. Lutain often challenged him to races- he always won.

"We should go to the forest!" Lutain enthused excitedly, *"Hunt!"*

"Lutain, I'm not eating a rat." Adrian almost chuckled back, the sound coming back in hitched hisses.

"No, you would get a squirrel." Lutain soothed, as if the rat was the offending part, *"a nice big squirrel."*

Adrian laughed, banking left and descending down a slope rapidly to avoid one open vent. He could hear voices inside, detention with Filch.

They continued at it, only retreating back to the dungeons when it was nearing a proper time to retire. Not that Adrian had been staying up too late anyways, he tended to oversleep.

(And skip classes. Madam Pomfrey must have talked to Snape because he hadn't made a ruckus of

it. He still had to do the assignments, after all.)

He was smart enough to not skip Umbridge, who was quickly becoming a royal pain.

There was a decree where she would watch every class, evaluate it or some sort of rubbish.

He hadn't thought much of it, so what if some woman was being critical of how other teachers taught?

Well, it was worse than he had expected.

When he walked down the lawns towards the forest for Care class, he found her and a hideously pink clipboard waiting for them beside Professor Grubbly-Plank.

"You do not usually teach this class, is that correct?" Umbridge asked Grubbly-Plank, her voice too sweet to be anything besides suspicious.

"Quite correct, I'm a substitute teacher standing in for Professor Hagrid."

Adrian spotted Malfoy grinning wildly and whispering to Crabbe and Goyle, each decorated with the faintest pink marks of their burning incident. Adrian had a bad feeling that they'd take advantage of the Ministry worker here.

"Hmm," Professor Umbridge spoke, her voice dropping lowly although she was still clearly able to be heard, "I wonder- the headmaster seems strangely reluctant to give me any information on the matter- can you tell me what is causing Professor Hagrid's very extended leave of absence?"

Malfoy's head snapped up in excitement. Adrian subtly walked forward, closer to Malfoy and his group.

"'Fraid I can't," said Professor Grubbly-Plank breezily. "Don't know anything more about it than you do. I got an owl from Dumbledore, that's as much as I know. Well...shall I get started then?"

Umbridge started wandering among the students, questioning them on magical creatures. Many of the Gryffindors were able to answer, at least they had learned information in the prior years.

"Well, you seem to know what you're doing, at any rate," said Professor Umbridge, making an obviously large check on her clipboard. Adrian tensed as she neared Goyle, "Now, I hear there have been injuries in this class?"

Goyle gave a stupid grin, Malfoy fastened to answer the question.

"A hippogriff!" Malfoy blurted excitedly. "It attacked me!"

Adrian smoothly interjected, "It actually injured me, and it only injured me because we hadn't followed the directions. Like anyone would, in any class." Adrian continued, looking at Umbridge.

Umbridge paused in her hasty scribbling. She slowly turned her head to look at Adrian, her eyes widening and face shifting into one of disgust as she took in his scars and disfigurement.

"Mr...Selwyn, is it?" She spoke, her voice lacking its usual charm. "I believe that from what I see, you must attract injuries. Due to that, obviously I must ignore your claim and focus on the fact that there *was* an injury, not *who* was injured."

Pansy shrunk back, and Daphne mumbled something under her breath.

Adrian inhaled through his nose, and released it quietly, "Actually, Professor, I tend to excel in this class."

Umbridge whirled around, not expecting the conversation to continue, "Why- I'm sorry, I must have misheard you. Obviously your track record suggests otherwise-"

Lutain dropped from Adrian's shoulders, his thick coils had been hidden by Adrian's black robe. Now that he was moving, it was evident that the humongous snake had been around him from the very start. Lutain was *long,* likely nearing 6 feet now.

Umbridge's eyes bulged in surprise, she hadn't seen Lutain coiled around him until just before.

"Ugh," She huffed, raising her robe as if Lutain touching them would ruin it, "disgusting *worm.* Go on, banish it." She sniffed, looking at the Professor who was very much surprised and reluctant.

"I am not a worm!" Lutain shrieked outraged, *"How dare you!"*

"Come back," Adrian spoke calmly, outstretching one arm. Lutain hesitated, before obliging and returning.

Umbridge huffed, "Was that supposed to, to somehow display your innate *talent?"*

Adrian blinked in surprise and slight shock- he had a *familiar,* of *course* that meant he had above average skills with magical creatures.

"Uh, actually ma'am," the Professor interjected, sounding almost shy, "Mr. Selwyn *is* our best student."

Umbridge smiled sweetly, something very very sharp.

"Well *obviously,"* she spoke, as if the idea was obvious, *"*Since he has creature blood, filthy half-breed, look at him!"

Adrian blinked in sheer bafflement.

Even Draco's breath hitched in confusion.

How the hell had she come to such an incorrect conclusion? Was she bonkers? Whispers began to spread, low murmuring voices that were just as confused as Adrian was. Nobody believed the rubbish.

On the Gryffindor side, Skylar bristled sharply. "Oi! Adrian's just good with creatures! Just like how you're a shite teacher!"

"He's stupid," Lutain fondly stated, tightening ever so slightly.

"Another night's detention, I think." She smiled at Skylar as if she was a shark, "Thank you very much, Professor Grubbly-Plank, I think that's all I need here."

"Jolly good," said Professor Grubbly-Plank.

Professor Umbridge turned and set off back across the lawn towards the castle. Without her noticing, the parchment she had written her evaluation on singed and furled in on itself, entirely useless.

Adrian only knew that Hermione was looking for him, because he had seen her peering around his usual haunts in the library.

Of course, he hadn't been there in forever, but she wouldn't have known that.

Adrian watched through the smallest gap in the piping, a vent that opened and looked down over the library. Lutain really had been right, Adrian had been missing out for *years.*

He moved, preparing himself for the disorienting after-image that always slammed into him after tasting the air. Unfortunately, it was much more accurate than his sight, which seemed more superior than Lutain's.

Hermione was retracing her steps, exiting the library although she had taken a direct path to where he had generally completed his essays. The likely conclusion was that she was searching for him, *outside* of class. Something personal then.

Slithering had become a lot easier, although when he was surprised or startled he had a nasty habit of accidentally raising the frill by his neck. Lutain made a game of it, trying to startle him as often as possible. Apparently the red of the membrane was 'striking'. Adrian *still* hadn't gotten around to seeing his reflection yet.

Hermione was easy to track by smell, her scent was obvious and pungent once he truly focused on it. She had left the library, ascending upwards towards the covered bridge.

She *was* looking for him, then. He did visit that bridge quite often.

Thankfully, the closer she got to the out of the way bridge, the less people were around to talk. Adrian moved swiftly, using his tail to push his upper body through the widened pipes.

Once he was positive that nobody was around, he anticlimactically nosed his entire bulk through one hinged ventilation shaft and out into the plain hallway. He hadn't a clue why the ventilation and the plumbing were connected, but he wasn't going to question it.

One short moment later, he stumbled upwards from his kneeling position, stretching his stiff shoulders and legs quickly. His sides ached, but they always had since he took up his late night slithering.

He slipped past the warming charm, wincing as the first bits of snow brushed by and chilled him. Hermione was staring off the edge of the bridge with a noticeable frown tugging on her face.

"Looking for me?" Adrian asked smoothly, shivering viciously as he tried to take a step out into the snow. Hermione spun, looking surprised and caught off guard before she smiled eagerly.

"Yes! Adrian! Yes, I- I, I was wondering, well, Umbridge is quite foul."

Adrian blinked slowly. It hadn't been a question.

"We- I mean myself and Ron and Skylar, were thinking of teaching others some proper Defense Against the Dark Arts. We, well, *I* was hoping you'd make it?"

Adrian balked in surprise, "Excuse me?"

Hermione shifted anxiously, peering around for any eavesdroppers, "I, I think you could help. I mean, I *know* you have plenty of spells and, and you may have more experience than we do-"

"My *experience,"* Adrian growled curtly, "got me *this,"*

He gestured abruptly at his face. Hermione's eyes drifted slightly, over to his cheekbone where one mark was still painfully purple. Her eyes snapped back, she still looked determined.

"I want you to come," She huffed, "You, you could be really helpful."

"I'm in Slytherin."

She scowled and looked downright murderous, "House relations can bother someone else. Please? *Please?"*

Adrian really didn't want to. He had too much on his plate already, he really did.

Adrian squinted at her suspicious, "Is this because of the couch?"

Hermione paused and for the briefest second, she looked just as confused as he felt, "I...couch?"

So Skylar hadn't told his friends about Adrian and Sirius destroying furniture. She didn't know about his...*spell arsenal.* He already knew that his spell work was likely better than Skylars, given on Sirius' balking expression the first time he truly let loose.

But if there was anyone learning Defense, let alone *Skylar,* his father would want to know. He'd want to know what was going on in the Order, even if it was just Skylar.

Adrian swallowed his pride and very painfully wheezed out, "Alright."

Hermione leapt upwards excitedly, grinning ear to ear, "Thank you! We're meeting in Hogsmeade! The next one- in three days! At the Hog's Head!"

Hogsmeade, wonderful.

It was impossible to miss the group of people, trying very obviously to remain inconspicuous.

Adrian rolled his eyes and tugged his wool cloak tighter around him, it really was so terribly cold.

Adrian followed behind, lingering under one lamppost and a sad looking wilted flower basket while the crowd shuffled past. He lingered a while longer, until he saw the Weasley Twins and a boy named Lee Jordan sneak through the streets carrying a large paper bag crammed with Zonko's merchandise.

Adrian slunk up next to them, following into step. Lee Jordan looked hesitant, but from encouraging nods from the twins Adrian walked alongside. They continued with their mindless chatter, incorporating Adrian into the group with a sloppy arm around his shoulders, and tucking the shorter boy into their sides.

They entered the Hogs Head after the swarm, occupying space nearest the door. Adrian peered around, recognizing a few faces here and there. Angelina Johnson, Ernie Macmillan, Justin Finch-Fletchley, Hannah Abbot, Cho Chang, and countless Gryffindor students.

Fred pushed through, grinning at the barman who froze in the act of wiping out a glass with a filthy rag. "Hi, could we have...twenty-five butterbeers, please?"

The barman glared at him for a moment, then, throwing down his rag irritably as though he had been in the middle of something very important, he started passing up dusty butterbeers.

"Cheers," Fred said with a smirk, passing out all of the bottles, "Cough up, everyone, I haven't got enough gold for all of these…"

Skylar looked as if someone had told him Sirius was actually a sensational pop singer. He looked baffled, disoriented and in awe of all of the chattering people. He turned on Hermione, speaking something under his breath rapidly.

"Cheers, mate." George offered, clicking a bottle against Adrian's with a small smile. Lee Jordan awkwardly smiled at Adrian as well, they hadn't met before.

Adrian kept near the back as everyone slowly began pulling of chairs, settling in a half circle around the still baffled and uncomfortable Skylar.

"Er," said Hermione, her voice higher than usual, "Well, er, hi."

The group focused its attention on her instead, although people did glance back at Skylar often.

"Well...erm, well, you know why you're here. Erm...well, Skylar here had the idea- i mean- *I* had the idea- that it might be good if people who wanted to study Defense Against the Dark Arts- and I mean, really study it, you know, not the rubbish that Umbridge is doing with us, because nobody could call that Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"Hear, hear," said one student, causing Hermione to brighten with confidence.

"Well, I thought it would be good if we, well, took matters into our own hands."

She paused, looking sideways at Skylar and went on, "And by that I mean learning how to defend ourselves properly, not just theory but with real spells."

"Why?" One student asked, a Ravenclaw who seemed skeptic.

"Well, I want to be properly trained in Defense because...because...well, because Lord Voldemort's back."

The reaction was immediate and predictable. Cho Chang's friend shrieked and spilled butterbeer. Terry Boot twitched, Padma Patil shuddered and Neville gave a hoarse yelp that he managed to turn into a cough. Everyone looked fixedly, even eagerly, at Skylar.

Skylar shuffled uncomfortably.

"If you want to join us, we need to decide how we're going to-"

"Where's the proof?" said one Hufflepuff aggressively. Adrian was surprised at the malice.

"Well, Dumbledore believes it-" Hermione began.

"You mean, Dumbledore believes him." the boy snidely interjected.

"Who *are* you?" Ron asked rudely.

"Zacharias Smith," Adrian hummed as he recognized the boy now, he had made a deal with the boy once, or gotten in a fight with him ages ago. "And I think we've got the right to know exactly what makes him say You-Know-Who's back."

"Look," Hermione intervened swiftly, "that's really not what this meeting was supposed to be about-"

"It's okay, Hermione." Skylar quietly spoke, looking pale and somewhat sad, "I saw him. But Dumbledore told the whole school what happened last year, and if you didn't believe him, you don't believe me, and I'm not wasting an afternoon trying to convince anyone."

"All Dumbledore told us last year was that Cedric Diggory got killed by You-Know-Who. He didn't give us details, he didn't tell us exactly how Diggory got murdered, and I think we'd all like to know-"

"If you've come to hear exactly what it looks like when Voldemort murders someone, I can't help you."

Skylar's eyes were locked on the boy, flashing with restrained anger, "I don't want to talk about Cedric Diggory, all right? So if that's what you're here for, you might as well clear out."

Adrian almost felt like applauding. Just to break the tense atmosphere; even the barman was listening.

"So," Hermione began, her voice record high pitch, "so, like I was saying...if you want to learn some Defense, then we need to work out how we're going to do it. How we're going to meet, and where we're going to-"

"Is it true, that you can produce a Patronus?" A girl asked, interrupting and looking at Skylar mystified.

There was a murmur of interest around the group at this.

"Yeah," Skylar spoke, his voice cautious and his body language defensive.

"A corporeal Patronus?" She asked, tilting her head interested.

"Yes, an antelope."

"Blimey, Sky!" Lee blurted, looking deeply impressed, "I never knew that!"

"Mum told Ron not to spread it around," Fred grinned at Skylar, "Said you got enough attention as it is."

"And in our first year," Neville spoke, addressing the group at large, "he saved that Sorcerer's stone, from You-Know-Who!"

Hannah Abbott's eyes were as round as galleons.

"And that's not to mention, all the tasks he had to get through in the Triwizard Tournament last year- getting past dragons and merpeople and acromantulas and things…" Cho Chang spoke softly, she was smiling.

There was a murmur of impressed agreement through the group.

Skylar looked like he wasn't happy with himself.

"Look," he sighed, "I...I don't want to sound like I'm trying to be modest or anything, but...I've had a lot of help with that stuff."

"Not with the dragon, that was wicked."

"No no, look. The thing is, is that it wasn't *just* me." Skylar swallowed and looked unsure, "I- I've

always had help. The Sorcerer's stone, Ron and Hermione helped me. The Patronus, Professor Lupin helped me for *months.* The dragon, bloody hell, the thing would have roasted me if Adrian hadn't-"

"Adrian?" Zacharias asked suddenly, looking defensive and angry, "Selwyn? The Potion's dealer?"

Adrian smiled a grin that was more vicious than friendly, "Hi."

Zacharias spun around, as well as a few other students. One Hufflepuff clutched her heart as if it would leap out from her chest. Zacharias' eyes widened in surprise before they narrowed in anger. "You! You bloody snake!"

Adrian lifted his hand and gave a little wave, wiggling his fingers just because he *knew* it annoyed others. Zacharias and he had gotten in a fight years ago. Adrian hadn't forgotten.

"Stop!" Hermione snapped angrily, "Look, Adrian has been a friend and *helpful* since I met him! He helped stop You-Know-Who going for the stone, he helped search for Slytherin's Monster, he helped Skylar with all of the tasks!"

"He can cast a Patronus too," Luna spoke quietly, a whisper that everyone heard, "He's fought Death Eaters."

Ernie MacMillan snorted, as if the idea was preposterous. Adrian blinked slowly and smiled once more, still as sharp as before, "I can cast a Patronus, apparate, and have a familiar. Still don't want my help?"

There was a pause before Fred whined angrily, "Why didn't you tell us you could apparate!"

"You could have helped us!" George pouted.

Adrian's cheek twitched, "Bellatrix taught me. I splinched my arm off, and she thought it was *funny."*

There was an uncomfortable pause as students who hadn't known about Adrian's relation slowly paled in horror. A few took a stumbling step back.

"I-I think everyone should write their name down, just so we know who was here. But, but I also think that we all ought to agree not to shout about what we're doing. So if you sign, you're agreeing not to tell Umbridge- or anyone else- what we're up to." Hermione shakily recovered the group, directing attention back to the matter at hand.

Adrian frowned slightly, that wasn't secure, "Give it to me. I'll bind it."

"Like *hell* you will." Macmillan growled angrily.

Adrian's face twitched again, he felt an overwhelming desire to curse the prefect.

"It's a good idea, and Adrian knows more binding spells than I do!" Hermione blurted, swallowing quickly, "I- what were you thinking?"

Adrian blinked, his temper fading quickly, "Ah, inability to speak about the list or who is on it. It would just...fade off."

Hermione paused, worrying her tongue, "A notice-me-not in language?"

Adrian gave a small nod, he had dealt enough of those back in his dealing days.

Nobody raised objections as Adrian spelled the paper quietly, pointedly signing his name and passing it on. There were a few hesitant, but ultimately everyone there did sign.

In groups of two and threes, the rest of the group took their leave too. Luna smiled, and once more Adrian was left wondering how she knew about his Patronus. Had he mentioned it to her in passing? Had Skylar interacted with her outside of the train and mentioned it to her?

"See you around, Adrian?" Hermione asked hopefully. Adrian only gave a brisk nod, tugging the hood of his cloak up and slipping out.

On the far side of Hogsmeade, Daphne Greengrass' eyebrows furrowed in confusion as she entered the completely abandoned creature shop. A fine layer of dust coated all surfaces, cages were left empty and barren.

"Hello?" She asked quietly, peering into the empty back room and into the storage room, bare except a pile of feathers.

"Dear?" Someone asked, looking in from the front window, "Oh hello! I'm so terribly sorry, I forgot to lock up! I was just in the other day, taking out the last of the documents."

Daphne blinked, "I- there was a man? Who ran the store?"

The woman paused, then looked at her sadly, "Yes, so terrible what happened. Did you know him well?

Daphne froze, then forced on a wide eyed innocent expression, "Something *happened?"*

"Oh you poor dear," the woman fretted, "Yes, got attacked by some pesky robber. Tried some sort of memory charm, did some real damage. Poor man doesn't even remember how to eat on his own, such a horrid thing."

Daphne nodded along, feeling frazzled and confused. When had that happened? Wouldn't it have hit the papers? It hadn't been *that* long, Astoria really did love her pet. She was hoping to get another.

It felt like just last year she had been inside with Adrian-

Her breath hitched and then she frowned.

Adrian...Adrian didn't know any memory charms, *did he?*

No, no it was one thing to presume that Adrian would attack a defenseless man, especially one that had interacted so positively with Adrian. There wasn't any reason, or rationale behind assuming Adrian somehow was involved.

Although….

"Do you know what happened?" Daphne asked, pitching her voice slightly higher, as if anxious, "did they ever catch the thief?"

The woman frowned, scuttling worriedly to try and reassure Daphne, "Oh! Oh I wouldn't worry about that! The thief ran off after what happened! Probably scared himself something terrible! Nothing was stolen!"

Something in Daphne's stomach sunk even deeper.

"Ah, thank you anyways." Daphne smiled weakly, and for once, it wasn't fake.

There was no reason to think Adrian was involved. There was *no reason* to think Adrian was involved.

(Being a brat was one thing, but actively *attacking* someone was something entirely different.)

Daphne was going to keep her distance. Adrian Selwyn suddenly seemed a lot more dangerous than she had ever assumed. She knew if she kept pressing, someone would end up terribly injured.

'I'm confused. I don't know what's going on, I feel antsy and on edge. Like I need to shed my skin, like It doesn't fit me right anymore. But instead of growing larger, I feel like I'm shriveling inwards.'

Adrian hadn't seen Luna in a while, not that he had been avoiding her outright.

He had been busy, distracted by adventuring through the castle and practicing his animagus transformation. It was rocky, stilted and uncomfortable in a way he knew was horrifying to watch. The way his eyes remained too large before they audibly *popped* and shrunk to size. The way his skin *melted* off before growing the thick scales. It was disgusting, and in a strange way intriguing. He'd been distracted with it.

He had seen Luna at the Hog's Head, in the crowd of people who listened to Skylar Potter's sermon. Besides that, he hadn't interacted with her much.

He still wondered how she knew he could cast the patronus, not to mention her unique way of knowing things she shouldn't. He assumed she had been out in the forest, tending to her thestrals and unicorns or other strange beasts she could find, not ignoring him but never running into him.

She would have liked that Grifdor he gave Nagini.

Winter started coming, and with that the cold was even more unbearable. Adrian invested in enhancing his clothing with warming charms, much to Lutain's delight. Once properly obtaining an Animagus transformation, traits of the animal form often leaked through to the human form. It seemed logical that Adrian would be more sensitive to the cold.

With that, Adrian shuffled down the path outside, heavily wrapped in warm clothing to fend off the chill. It was Tuesday, and Care for Magical Creatures had been moved with the swift return of Hagrid.

Adrian hadn't seen the man since he returned. He was startled outright when he saw the professor, wrapped in thick blankets and his face mottled sickeningly with bruises. Cuts along his cheek looked aggravated, weeping slowly and adding to his ominous picture.

Hagrid didn't notice Adrian, who stuck to the back. Hagrid hoisted what appeared to be half a dead cow over his shoulder, its back legs flopped limply.

"We're workin' in here today!" Hagrid called to the approaching students, jerking his head towards the dark trees behind him, "Bit more sheltered! Anyway, they prefer the dark…"

Adrian cocked his head curiously, were they seeing Acromantulas? Adalonda had said they had cleared out.

"What prefers the dark?" Malfoy asked sharply to Crabbe and Goyle, a trace of panic in his voice. "What did he say prefers the dark- did you hear?"

Adrian smiled slightly, and brushed past Malfoy solidly enough to jolt the other boy.

"Ready?" Hagrid asked happily, looking excited, "Right, well, I've bin savin' a trip inter the forest fer yer fifth year. Thought we'd go an' see these creatures in their natural habitat. Now, what we're studyin' today is pretty rare, I reckon I'm the on'y person in Britain who's managed ter train 'em, not ter mention they're one 'er the *oldes'* 'erds…"

"And you're sure they're trained, are you?" said Malfoy, the panic in his voice even more pronounced now.

Adrian's mouth twitched, "Don't worry, Draco. I'm sure it won't bite."

Hagrid visibly lightened upon seeing Adrian, "Adrian! Nice ter see ya! They missed yer, tha' one female kep' lookin' fer ya!"

Adrian blinked before he realized *what* they were seeing. Draco and a few other Slytherin's looked collectively horrified that Adrian apparently was friendly with the monsters. Right as they should, Daphne in particular looked rather uneasy.

"Are you sure they're trained?" Malfoy hissed, sliding up to Adrian.

"Sure, they only attack if we tell them to." Adrian calmly added, trying his hardest not to smile as Draco instantly dropped back and out of his sight. He obviously remembered the train.

They walked for about ten minutes until they reached a place where the trees stood so closely together that it was as dark as twilight and there was no snow on the ground at all. Adrian walked over from the group, depositing his bag on one stump he commonly used as a chair. Luna had smoothed off the bark, making it a nice bench.

Hagrid dropped the cow, it bounced off the ground sickly.

"Gather roun', gather roun'," Hagrid encouraged, "Now, they'll be attracted by the smell o' the meat but I'm goin' ter give 'em a call anyway…"

Hagrid shook his shaggy hair out of his face and gave an odd, shrieking cry that echoed through the dark trees like the call of some monstrous bird. Nobody laughed; most of them looked too scared to make a sound.

Hagrid gave the cry again. A minute passed in which the class continued to peer nervously over their shoulders and around trees for a first glimpse of whatever it was that was coming.

Skylar gasped loudly, nudging Ron and looking between two trees. A pair of blank, white, shining eyes were growing larger through the gloom and a moment later the dragonish face, neck, and then skeletal body of a great, black, winged horse emerged from the darkness. It looked around at the class for a few seconds, swishing its long black tail, then bowed its head and began to tear flesh from the dead cow with its pointed fangs.

Ron was still staring around the trees and after a few seconds he whispered, "Why doesn't Hagrid call again?"

Most of the class were wearing expressions as confused and nervously expectant as Ron's and were still gazing everywhere but at the horse standing feet from then.

Theo stared at the horse with an expression of great distaste, and Neville was watching the swishing progress of the long black tail.

"Oh, an' here comes another one!" said Hagrid proudly, as a second black horse appeared from the trees, folded its leathery wings closer to its body and dipped its head to gorge on the meat.

"Excuse me," said Malfoy in a sneering voice, "but what exactly are we supposed to be seeing?"

Adrian smiled amused as Hagrid rolled his eyes and pointed to the cow carcass. The whole class stared, several people gasped as bits of flesh stripped themselves away from the bones and vanished into the air.

"What's doing it?" Parvarti, a Gryffindor, demanded in a terrified voice.

"Adrian?" Hagrid asked, beaming at his pride student. Adrian hopped up from his bench, looking very uninterested as the two thestrals paid him no mind.

"Thestrals." He sighed, "Superstitiously thought of as bad luck, but they're not. Only those who have seen someone die can see them."

"Here's another couple, look-" Hagrid hushed, pointing between two trees. One thestral emerged, enormous and larger than the two already there by almost double. It's thin ears brushed against a low hanging branch, causing it to sway. Near its flank a new one, a foal if that was the term, stumbled along. All knobbly knees and disproportionate head to its body.

Adrian heard something whisper, and instinctively his hand flashed to his neck. He wasn't wearing the locket that day- so what was whispering…

"Hem, hem,"

Professor Umbridge had arrived. She was standing a few feet away from Skylar, wearing a green hat and cloak, her clipboard at the ready.

Hagrid, who had never heard Umbridge's fake cough before, was gazing in some concern at the foal, evidently under the impression it had made the sound.

"Hem, hem,"

"Oh hello!" Hagrid smiled, having located the noise.

Adrian ignored it, and instead tilted his head curiously at the largest thestral, and clearly the oldest. He hadn't ever seen it before, which was surprising since he and Luna fed them quite regularly.

He stepped towards it, ignoring Pansy's shriek of fear as he neared something that was bending the tree's branches away.

The thestral exhaled, its reptilian nostrils flaring at the rush of air.

"Yeah, I was gonna tell yeh how come we got a herd. Yeah, so, we started off with a male an' five females. This one," Hagrid patted the first thestral to emerge, "name o' Tenebrus, he's my special favorite, firs' one born here in the forest-"

"Are you aware," Umbridge said loudly, interrupting him, "that the Ministry of Magic has classified thestrals as 'dangerous'?"

The largest thestral, the newcomer, tilted its head at Umbridge, as if it understood. It didn't seem

impressed.

"Thestrals aren' dangerous! All righ, they might take a bite outta you if yeh really annoy them-"

"Shows...signs...of...pleasure...at...idea...of...violence…" muttered Umbridge, scribbling on her clipboard again.

The newest thestral snorted as if her words were just as outrageous. The younger one, a foal, chirped loudly like a vulture chick.

Ron blinked, peering around confused.

'...Hagrid protects…' Adrian heard, something hoarse and quiet, drifting on the wind through the trees.

"No- come on!" said Hagrid, looking a little anxious, "Thestrals jus' got a bad reputation because o' the death thing- people used ter think they were bad omens, didn' they? Jus' didn' understand, did they?"

Umbridge did not answer, only kept scribbling with the condescending smile on her face.

"Do you find," said Professor Umbridge in a ringing voice to Pansy Parkinson, "that you are able to understand Professor Hagrid when he talks?"

Adrian slowly turned, searching for her. It was almost as if Pansy knew better than to say anything bad, since Adrian simply adored the class. Her mouth opened, and she struggled to say anything. Umbridge frowned and looked disappointed.

'...vile witch…'

"Good stuff abou' thestrals. Well, once they're tamed, like this lot, yeh'll never be lost again. Mazin' sense o' direction, jus' tell 'em where yeh want ter go an' they'll take yeh. Some peopl' say yer can 'ear 'em speak, but onl' if yer related."

Hermione startled in alarm, "Excuse me, Professor. How can you be *related* to a Thestral?"

'Silly witch…' The largest thestral near Adrian spoke, it's breaths deep and calm, *'My children…'*

Hagrid looked excited, "Well, tha' rumors say if a thestral think' yer died too young, they'll take yer breath and raise it."

Umbridge frowned, "Excuse me, but any animal or mindless beast that has the capability of killing a child is *instantly* deemed a category five-"

"No no! Yer misunderstan'-"

Adrian peered at the thestral behind him, even looking up it towered above, ancient and weathered. It arched its head, looking down at him curiously, *"Hello, child."*

Adrian flinched in surprise, looking at the thestral in awe.

Ron looked sick, and shaken as he peered around the clearing. The smallest thestral chirped again, pawing at the cow corpse curiously and struggling to pull off a tough tendon from the leg.

Umbridge finalized something and left, bounding across the clearing startlingly close to one thestral. It nipped at her head with its fanged mouth, stealing her hat and walking between the trees

out of sight. A few Gryffindors giggled, even though they couldn't see them.

"I'm surprised so many people could see them," Ron spoke quietly, his voice heard simply with how quiet everyone was, "Four in one class-:

"Yeah, Weasley, we were just wondering," said a malicious Draco, "D'you reckon if you saw someone snuff it you'd be able to see the Quaffle better?"

The large thestral huffed, as if displeased. Ron flushed and the golden trio instantly started hissing insults.

"I see yer made a friend." Hagrid beamed, looking at the large thestral with obvious awe in his eye, "She' a real 'beaut. Rare, 'ard to find 'er. Rear's the 'oungings."

The thestral stretched its wings, the leathery folds were marked with scar tissue, silvery in the faint light.

"What's her name?" Adrian asked, swallowing and reaching out to gently stroke the thin emaciated side.

"Oh! Well I jus' call 'er Trymon, yer know, tha fairy princess?"

"Mylcades." It hissed, the word only and ancient yet very distinctly audible.

"Nice to meet you," Adrian swallowed, feeling the ridges in its side, "I'm Adrian."

The thestral tossed its tail, swishing over the ground and disrupting fallen leaves, *"No. I came for you. You did not die."*

Adrian flinched back, stepping back and away from the thestral.

Ron was still peering around, pale and confused. He was still bickering with Malfoy, but something was bothering him.

The thestral stepped forward, the giant hoof crunching leaves as it butted its reptilian snout into Adrian's chest firmly, *"You brought me breath. I came for her, and she lives."*

"I...I don't…" Adrian shook his head, gently pushing the thestral away, "Hagrid, what...how are thestrals born?"

Hagrid looked surprised, although still excited to talk, "Oh! Well, jus' like any normal an'mal, yer get two togeth'r an' yer get a foal-"

"Wrong," Mylcades whispered. Adrian wanted it as far away from him as he could get.

"- but they're rumors tha' thestrals take th' las' breath o' dyin children', and teach 'em t' fly. Bad reputation in ma' 'pinion, but only tha' bad deaths, the *wrong* deaths they take."

Mylcades blinked slowly disconcertingly as pale white eyes stared at him hauntedly.

"Yer know, the ah," Hagrid shuffled, looking somberly at the youngest thestral, playing with the cattle's hoof, "the one's who die too young, die badly or ah, suff'r t' much."

The youngest thestral flapped its wings, smacking uncoordinatedly into the male Hagrid liked. It snuffed, knocking its muzzle into the foal affectionately.

Ron flinched, and rubbed at his ears as if they were plugged.

Adrian froze.

"She's mine," the thestral hummed quietly, voice ominous in the gloom *"You will be too."*

Adrian shook his head, he felt stinging bile burn his tongue, "No, *no*- I- I'm not-"

"Adrian?" Hagrid asked concerned, his eyebrows pinching together worriedly.

"You smell like rot."

Adrian shook his head viciously.

"You're dying."

Adrian snatched his bag and ignored Hagrid's worried shouts, he bolted.

He had to get away from that monster.

December arrived, bringing with it more snow and a positive avalanche of homework for the fifth years. Adrian leapt on it, struggling to complete the lengthy essays and homework assignments to remain under the radar the best he could.

He had received an Owl from Remus just days before, a formal invitation to spend the holidays with him. Adrian sent Hedwig back, explaining how he was intending to stay at the castle over the Holidays. He wasn't sure if Remus would accept that, but it was a try.

In reality, he was already finalizing things and arranging his room, storing away the more illegal or questionable possessions in harder to find places. It was almost guaranteed that he would have his room searched by the worried staff. He was already working on shrinking his possessions, as well as constructing a rough harness to strap onto Lutain so the two of them could escape the castle through Adalonda's passageways. Once free of the wards, a simple apparation over to Rowle's manor and he was home for the holidays.

Until then, all Adrian had left to do was to attend the first meeting for Skylar's little tutoring session. Well, not the *first,* but he hadn't bothered showing up if it was over basic spells. A waste of his time. Hermione had very subtly slipped to him the date, as well as a spelled galleon that was so ironically similar to the Dark Mark Adrian was in stitches laughing.

He arrived after the main swarm of people had arrived. The large room was decorated by an assortment of christmas decorations, lanterns and tinsel and even wreaths decorated the walls, a large window had appeared showing a relaxing heavy snowfall.

Lutain had come along as well, and was investigating a bronze spiral french horn in fascination. Adrian couldn't tell if it was due to the shape, or how he could see a reflection.

"Okay!" Skylar shouted on the far side of the room, "I thought this evening we should just go over the things we've done so far, because it's the last meeting before the holidays and there's no point in starting anything new right before a three-week break-"

"We're not doing anything new?" said Zacharias Smith, in a disgruntled whisper loud enough to carry through the room, "If I'd known that, I wouldn't have come…"

"We're all really sorry Sky didn't tell you then," said Fred loudly.

Several people sniggered. Even Lutain looked amused from where he was methodically climbing up a Christmas tree.

"We can practice in pairs," said Skylar, "We'll start with the Impediment Jinx, just for ten minutes, then we can get out the cushions and try Stunning again."

It all felt so boringly simple for Adrian, he didn't bother pairing up with anyone. He saw Hermione frown, and make way as if to comment, but she stopped when Ron said something to halt her.

After the class had moved on to stunning (which was almost as cringe worthy as before), Adrian started to get bored.

If this was how normal teaching sessions went, it was no wonder everyone was so ruddy bad at spells.

"Are you going to join?" Lutain asked curiously, watching as Adrian pulled out his wand instead of lounging near Lutain and the Christmas tree.

"May as well," Adrian sighed, confident nobody would hear him over the shouting.

He pointed his wand upwards, aiming towards the strings of tinsel that hung from the ceiling, "avis."

Songbirds burst from his wand, chirping happily and excitedly as they flitted around the room. Already Adrian felt his blood thrumming, pushing excitedly through his body at the sound of cardinals.

The last time he had trained using birds- well, Bellatrix found him shaking in a training room covered in gore and feathers.

He was half tempted to just...cast the spell. Rumpervis, he remembered the incantation easily. He also remembered how blessedly wonderful he felt when he just...let go.

His hand clenched around his wand, looking at a single unsuspecting cardinal.

He could cast it once. Just once.

"Rum-"

"Master?" Lutain asked warily, *"They are watching you."*

Adrian bit his tongue, holding his wand shakily at the bird.

He couldn't. Not now.

"Stupefy." He muttered grouchily, sending out the stunner sharply. The spell was fast, much faster than it had been last year. It knocked into the bird, not only stunning it but throwing it across the room towards the other side. If the spell hadn't rendered it unconscious, hitting the far wall certainly did.

The other birds chirped and sang in alarm, starting to fly around frazzled in the room. Lutain watched energetically, climbing up to the top of his tree, coiling around a pixie tree topper as he struck out at the birds, biting dry and for his own amusement.

Adrian felt a small smile twitched on his mouth as he aimed and struck down two cardinals in quick succession, tracking a goldfinch with careful movements. It looked a bit like a snitch really.

"Bloody hell, mate!" Fred laughed, breaking away from George to watch Adrian entertained, "Sure you aren't a seeker?"

Adrian balked, "I hate flying."

Adrian noticed then, that Skylar had been watching him quite attentively.

The birds were all flapping, hiding out on the rafters out of sight and out of aim. Even with a different spell, Adrian couldn't hit them.

At the end of the hour, Skylar called everyone to a halt.

"You're all getting really good, when we get back from the holidays, we can start doing some of the big stuff- maybe even Patronuses."

There was a murmur of excitement through the room. Adrian rolled his eyes and stretched, watching the birds above in case one swept down.

The room began to clear in the usual twos and threes; most people wished Skylar a polite Happy Christmas as they went. Ron and Hermione began stacking cushions away neatly, practicing levitation charms as they went.

Luna looked at Adrian, staring at him with an expression that was so incredibly sad.

"What did you do to her?" Hermione asked sourly, obviously seeing how heartbroken and upset Luna was.

Adrian shrugged. He hadn't done anything.

"You head out, I'll wait behind." Skylar smiled at Hermione and Ron. They left, soon only Adrian and Skylar remained.

"So," Skylar awkwardly started, clambering onto some cushions to sit down, evidently Adrian was in for a conversation, "I saw you with those birds."

Adrian shrugged, reaching to Lutain and helping him climb off of his Christmas perch.

"That was really impressive... like," Skylar struggled, "even my dad isn't that good at some spells. I was worried you'd start slashing them, I mean I don't know what you have arranged, *er,* if you *need* something to be arranged. I mean, I could try to find a...a desk or-"

Adrian snapped his head around, eyes narrowed and face carefully flat, "What would your precious father say, knowing you're *encouraging dark magic."*

Skylar gaped, gasping like a fish before he weakly laughed and rubbed the back of his neck, "Yeah, I guess that does sound bad. I er- I just want...er…"

Adrian paused, and sighed, "What is it, Potter?"

Skylar chewed on his lip, "I just...I'm sorry."

Adrian blinked in surprise.

"I mean, I just…" Skylar gave a long exhale, "I've just been thinking a lot. Since...since last year. And I just...I'm sorry. I know, that you've had a tough time growing up and…" Skylar's voice became quiet, almost fragile, "I couldn't imagine it."

Adrian stilled, his heart sounded heavy in his ears. The snowfall outside was heavier, now swirling and looking so bitterly cold, "What's brought this on?"

Skylar looked out the window as well, into the swirling white, "I think it was the thestrals. Well, bloody hell it's been a lot of things. Like, when you...when you came back from Mungos and attacked me- and...and when you were with Sirius and you were *laughing* and…" Skylar licked his lips, as if his mouth were dry.

"The thestrals were it though. Like, I saw them and i'll be honest they freak me out. It's just, you knew them and I remember Hagrid saying that you helped feed them for *years* and I just..." Skylar's jaw flexed, twitching as he refused to look away from the window, "Cedric really...I saw Cedric die. I saw him die, and you saw someone die, right in front of you, years ago."

Adrian flinched.

He wasn't going to think about it.

He *wasn't.*

David kept bleeding and bleeding. The bloodstain bloomed and spread larger and wider until it touched grass, and then it kept spreading. He was gasping, short shallow breaths

How was he bleeding so much? How could someone bleed so much?

David stopped moving.

Then he stopped breathing.

"I was young," Adrian swallowed, his throat felt dry, "I barely remember it."

Skylar gave a single bark of laughter, bitter and sharp, "You don't- you don't just...just *forget* about it."

"Yes you do." Adrian blurted, not even hearing the slightly pained whine in his voice.

Skylar looked haunted, "I...I remember his eyes. They...Merlin, his *eyes."*

Adrian didn't think, he moved. He slashed his wand through the air, speaking the curse but he couldn't hear it.

Blood splashed over his face, soaking through his cloak and touching his neck, hot and wet.

The man was gurgling, one hand attempting feebly to hold his chest together, to stop his entrails and viscera from spilling out on the grass.

His eyes were bulging, gasping something wetly that sounded faintly like a plea.

Nagini moved, her teeth biting and tearing his throat to shreds as if it was wet newspaper.

His eyes were bulging and bleeding, broken vessels from the fear, the panic.

He didn't plea anymore.

"I don't think I'll ever forget it," Skylar admitted quietly, "What Cedric looked like. Laying there, on the grass. He, he was just...alive, and then… and then he wasn't."

"It wasn't your fault." Adrian spoke, his voice a hoarse whisper.

Adrian's hands were twitching, his breaths through his mouth felt cold, foreign. He felt like he was watching his body from the outside, he was a spectator.

He couldn't stop shaking.

Skylar laughed, something pitiful and angry and something Adrian heard coming from his own mouth a hundred times, "I was useless. I should have just *done* something!"

"You didn't kill him." Adrian repeated monotone.

"I let him *die!"*

"No- you...you didn't-" Adrian struggled, voice cracking and warbling.

He, Cedric's bright red ha- no, no *brown* hair-

'Let her starve to death.'

Adrian crumbled, he didn't even feel the impact of his knees on the floor.

"Adrian?" Skylar asked in alarm, stumbling upwards as he saw the other boy collapse.

Adrian wasn't seeing, he was shaking and his breathing was too hoarse and too quick. His hands were spasming, clenching in his hair and tugging backwards painfully.

"Adrian- you…" Skylar stumbled, nearly tripping and he hurried off the cushions, "Hey are you oka-"

Skylar stopped talking abruptly the moment he saw the tears, rapidly welling and falling out of Adrian's eyes as the other boy curled up even smaller and tighter, hiding his face in his legs.

She was a person. She was a *person* with a *life.* Not an abstract idea, or a thing. A person, he had- she was a *person.*

The thestral- *the thestral.*

"Hey," Skylar whispered, lowering to the ground guiltily. He shuffled slowly over the ground, cautious as he reached out, "Hey, are you okay?"

Adrian wasn't responding, too lost in whatever sort of fit this was.

The snake was nearby, watching him carefully although it didn't make any moves to get closer. Skylar took that as permission.

"Adrian," Skylar tried again, reaching out with a shaking hand to gently try and remove the other boy's fists from his hair, "That- that doesn't look comfortable. Come on, l- lets go."

He stumbled, and flinched when Adrian jerked away at the touch, curling in even further.

The snake was hissing something, a constant series of hissing that was disconcerting. Skylar watched it warily, as he very slowly wrapped his arms around the other boy.

Adrian froze, tensing in his arms as if he was under attack.

"Relax," Skylar spoke, his voice cracking halfway through, "Breathe with me, is that okay? I, ah, I could, uh…" Skylar floundered struggling to figure out what to do.

Adrian twisted and with almost vicious force he slammed his face into Skylar's chest, out of sight. His entire body was shaking, trembling as if he was terrified.

Skylar awkwardly used one hand to gently pry the slightly blueish hair out from the pale fingers, tucking his hands down somewhere less precarious. He took over, smoothing the ruffled messy strands with one hand.

"My mum used to do this when I was younger," Skylar spoke, his chest vibrating with his words, "When I was upset. I- I had a brother, I thought Moony told you. He ah, well…" Skylar tapered off slowly clearing his throat harshly, "she used to do this. Do you mind being hugged? Is this okay?"

Adrian mumbled something, barely understandable through the slur, "Havn't 'ver b'n hugg'd."

Skylar blinked in alarm, "O-*Oh,* well, ah, well, good thing I'm not going anywhere."

Adrian shook more, as if just reassuring him was something horrifying to hear.

Sweet Merlin, what the hell had Lestrange *done* to this kid.

"I'm not going anywhere," Skylar stated, trying to ignore how his throat felt so clogged, "actually, I got a letter from Remus about how excited he is to see you. He makes really good hot chocolate, it's amazing. And don't tell him I said this, but he does this thing where he'll snuggle you and fall asleep on top of you. And you can't get up because he just wants to make sure nobody can get to his cub."

Skylar gave a little laugh, only slightly sniffly. Adrian was vibrating like a twig in a harsh gale, "He really loves you, he talks about you all the time. Half of the letters I get from him are questions about how to make you comfortable, hell I think we talk about you more than anything else!"

"He d'snt." Adrian mumbled again, it sounded wet and horrible.

"He does." Skylar scrambled to assure, feeling more and more horrified by the second, "Remus loves you-"

And Adrian seemed to fall apart. If Skylar thought before was a mess, oh no. Adrian lost the ability to even sit upright, nearly collapsing into the other stockier boy. His harsh breathing shifted into something shrieking, bawling and hoarse cries that sounded more infantile than anything his age. Skylar's robe was being twisted through clenched spasming hands, white knuckles that pounded hard enough to bruise. Skylar grunted wordlessly, accepting the blows without question.

'What did Lestrange do to you?' Skylar thought in horror, holding onto Adrian who tried to shrink away and burrow further at the same time.

Adrian was repeating something over and over, a mantra that was sounding more and more unhinged the louder it got, until he was screaming muffled into Skylar's robe.

He was apologizing. He was apologizing over and over and-

Skylar felt like something was tearing inside him.

"It's okay, it's not your fault." Skylar swallowed down the lump, "Adrian it's not your fault! It's not your fault!"

"I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm *sorry,"* Adrian repeated, not even hearing Skylar.

"Adrian!" Skylar shouted, and without really knowing what else to do, he slapped him.

Fire.

The room caught on *fire,* burning hot and bright and *so* much worse than the train. The cushions Skylar had been sitting on just moments before bubbled, hissing and melting into greenish puddles. The Christmas trees had crumbled, crackling loudly in seconds as the fire had somehow turned *blue.*

The glass to outside was cracking, hair thin fractures spreading faster than broken ice. In seconds, Skylar was sweating.

He was going to- he was going to *burn alive.*

"Adrian!" Skylar shouted, shaking the boy who was *still* repeating a mantra as if entirely out of it, "Adrian! Adrian it's not your fault, it's *not your fault!"*

The fire died down instantly, although the room was still suffocatingly hot. Adrian was shaking, quiet and fragile as a leaf although thankfully out of whatever trance that was.

"It's not your fault." Skylar repeated, throat sore from the hot air and his shouting, "I don't know what happened, but it wasn't your fault."

Adrian shook his head, "I-" He whispered, voice distorted from distress, "I left her there to die. I *left her,* and she *died."*

"It- I'm sure it wasn't your fault." Skylar argued. Adrian laughed, something fringing on insane and hysteria, "She was *begging me* and I *left her there to starve!"*

'I killed her, I killed her,' Adrian thought to himself, bordering on broken sobs, *'I killed a person, I killed a little girl.'*

Adrian knew, that he could never go back.

The snake was silent. The room was silent.

Skylar didn't know what to say.

And Adrian collapsed, more sane and more lucid than before, but crying as if the entire world had fallen apart around him.

Tomorrow morning, when the sun rose, Adrian had vanished from the Hogwarts grounds.

Hedwig carried a letter, explaining vaguely to Remus how he had, simply put, snuck out to have Christmas on his own.

Adrian wasn't feeling any better as he traveled down to the Chamber, cramming his illegal or more questionable objects in a corner. Wormtail was nowhere to be seen, neither was Adalonda.

"Ready to go?" Lutain asked excitedly, although slightly timid. Adrian snappishly pulled out the shrunken bag, sliding his wand into a crude harness and strapped it onto Lutain's body. It only had to hold until they were beyond the wards.

He shifted, moving more fluidly than before as his scales roughly scraped over the floor. He was mindful to keep his mitre down, lest it get stuck in the piping.

They escaped the warding, traveling through a pipe that extended nearly all the way to Hogsmeade. It opened into an underground cavern, slowly sloping up towards the surface in the disguise of a cleverly hidden cave.

Adrian shifted back, adjusting to arms and legs as he grabbed his wand and shrunken bag, reversing the charm and sliding it over his shoulders.

"Hop in the bag, you won't get splinched," Adrian instructed coldly.

Lutain knew better than to argue, especially with Adrian's splinching record.

He tensed, held it, then twisted.

There was a sharp crack, and they vanished.

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Suzie

Chapter Summary

> Adrian discovers the colours of morality, grows a backbone, and Suzie makes a terrible mistake.

'I can figure this out on my own. I know I can. I wanted to be useful. Well, now I am. Now I'm useful and, and now I'm second guessing it? This is what I wanted.'

The tattoo had told him that his father was in hiding on a property that belonged to Rowle, somewhere near Kirkwall.

Adrian snapped into existence, surprised and shivering against the absolutely *horrid* chill.

Lutain hissed in alarm, flailing on the snow until Adrian snatched him up with numb fingers, clutching him close to his chest.

"Why is it colder?" Lutain bemoaned, thrashing still although Adrian suspected it was only theatrics, *"Why must I suffer?"*

"You're the drama queen here, I think I'm the one suffering." Adrian deadpanned, his body vibrating through fine shivers.

The snow was dirty and tarnished, tousled and scooped away in large swathes. Most likely cattle, searching for a hint of green in the northern flatlands.

Adrian felt around Lutain's body, struggling to unlatch the ramshod harness and pull his wand off of his familiar. Once he double checked that nobody was in the area, he cast two warming charms and stuttered his way through a half dozen locator charms. None of them worked.

"Why didn't you think of this sooner?" Lutain bemoaned, acting as if he was still cold although he was firmly coiled in his heating ward, *"How did you not think of this?"*

"Well sorry, I was a bit preoccupied." Adrian snapped out sourly, rotating in place only to see a pasture of white snow and dead grass.

Lutain sniffed haughtily, although quieted as Adrian began to walk. His shoes crunched through snow, although he stuck to the cattle tracks for as long as he could.

They found a road, barely trodden and clearly muggle. It would do, at least it was better than a pasture in the middle of nowhere.

"I don't think there are any buses out here," Adrian explained unnecessary to Lutain. He opened his robe, wincing as the cold winter air kissed his exposed collarbone and shoulder.

"Nagini?" Adrian addressed his shoulder, not wanting to have to remove any more than necessary. His skin stubbornly remained blank.

"Hah," Lutain cheered, watching in amusement as Adrian cursed and began to shuck his clothing. Soon he was shirtless, shivering and ready to collapse in a snowbank.

"Nagini?" Adrian tried again, already exhausted and sniffling, *"Nagini, we're here."*

Nothing.

Lutain tilted his head, *"Is that a cow?"*

Adrian gave a groan of frustration, *"Probably! We just came out of a pasture! For cows!"*

Lutain's face didn't change, yet Adrian knew he was smirking at him.

"Why not try thinking?" Lutain offered helpfully.

Adrian inhaled, and exhaled.

"Lutain, I don't think you're capable of that level of sarcasm. Otherwise I'd have left you out here all alone."

"Master, the thinking, with the…" Lutain struggled with words, pausing brokenly *"Nagini speaks of it. The, the thinking and whispering to your father."*

Adrian blinked in surprise and amazement, *"Lutain, Legilimency only works if I can see them."*

"No, no Nagini does it far away."

Adrian paused and his brow furrowed, considering. *"I can try? Maybe Father made some sort of connection when he made my Occlumency barriers."*

Adrian shrugged and in a lack of better idea, settled down on the snow, sitting on his black outer robe. He exhaled slowly, closing his eyes and digging back into the swirl of his mind.

The barriers were holding strong, just as chaotic and confusing as ever. Whenever his father entered his mind, he emerged from the same spot; the closed eye, the flower blossom ready to open.

He found it, hidden and shifting like he was viewing it under a fast moving stream.

How hard would it be to open it, to press and slip inside? It had always opened the other way, but doorways enabled passage from both sides.

Adrian exhaled, his entire body slackening from his hunched position. Lutain watched in alarm as even the shivering ceased in one fluid motion, as if Adrian had fallen asleep.

Deep within, he pressed downwards with a mixture of curiosity and determination. It felt unique, or his mind interpreted it at unique. Everything in his walls was smoke, barely tangible to the degree of driving one insane. The tingling burn as if his entire limb had fallen asleep, an icy caress of burning metal.

The shell, for that's what it felt like, was cold and smooth. Soft yet not pliant, roughened in spots like a walnut husk and then slick like abalone.

Adrian pressed and pushed, tugging at the seal without any grace in his actions. He had seen it open before, he *knew* the seam could split apart.

It was frozen like marble….and then it cracked.

The very area *felt* different, foreign and intrusive as the hinge opened and oil slipped through. Toxic and poisoned, yet sweet like honey. Velvet like the petals of hydrangeas.

Adrian pressed inside, disoriented as the very atmosphere changed to something acidic. Different-foreign and *not his*

mind. He had gotten *through.*

Something cold attacked, biting so quickly over and over that Adrian couldn't even *scream-*

Then he was out, kicked out not only of the open eye but of *his mind* as well… The air was sharp and burned his lungs, his bones felt hollow and bruised and then he teetered over backwards into the snow.

Adrian yelped, scrambling to try and rightside himself, only to grab handfuls of slush that melted on contact. He wheezed, and his chest thrummed painfully as if he had been kicked by a hippogriff. His head *ached.*

Lutain watched with a degree of amusement, yet came across very unimpressed.

Adrian hadn't even managed to rightside himself before he felt something, a small touch of something changing. Then he was laying slack on the ground.

His father could enter at any time, he hadn't known that. He thought they had to be nearby.

And yet-

He choked, back arching and forcing his shoulders further into the slush as his brain *burned.*

"Master!" Lutain hissed in alarm, rearing and looking for threats anxiously. The prior episode was relaxed, thus one had Adrian contorting into the unmistakable body language of agony.

Adrian whimpered, something pitiful and animalistic yet he couldn't hear it. His heart was a drum, pounding an inch from his brain and rattling his skull so hard his teeth throbbed.

Something moved, digging and tearing and *destroying* his walls and twisting the pillars of his pride until he faltered and he was *falling oh Merlin he was falling…*

Adrian gasped, jolting upwards as in a single blink, it was gone.

He coughed, rolling onto his side as he vomited, thick bile and pumpkin juice that painted the snow a crude brown.

He wretched twice more, pausing and gasping obscenely for the winter's sharp air, nearly crying as it seared his throat.

He couldn't breathe through his nose, simply due to the lingering smell of bile and vomit. It trickled down the back of his throat. His mouth wasn't fairing much better.

In the distance, a cow mooed lowly.

There was a low crack in the air, like a twig breaking.

"Why are you on the ground?" Adrian's father asked, voice dry and without concern; It was layered

thinly with amusement.

"Bite me," Adrian groaned out, head still swirling and aching.

His father huffed, a single sound of surprised glee that nearly bordered on laughter, "My, my. Are you already in that teenage rebellion phase?"

Adrian struggled with one arm braced in the snow to rightside himself. He squinted, only opening one eye through the bright glare of sunlight reflecting off snow, "I think that hit when you used me as a lightning rod."

His father froze, likely dumbfounded with Adrian's snark. A second of silence before a low chuckle of *glee* emanated from the man.

"Hello," Lutain chirped, voice meek and slightly shy.

"Hello, Lutain." His father responded, *"Shall we apparate to the estate?"*

"Are we keyed into the wards?" Adrian asked, finally rightsizing himself. He spat once, a glob of mucus and phlegm tinted brown with stomach sick. It joined the puddle, already smelling acrid.

"You are. I've taken liberties already, everything is prepared."

"Joy," Adrian grimaced, stumbling to his feet and grabbing his cloak and shirt from the snow, looping Lutain around his neck for safekeeping. He reached out, looping his arm through his father's outstretched arm, and braced.

They apparated away from the northern highlands, leaving cow pastures and vomit behind.

They appeared inside a building that was strikingly different than anything Adrian had ever seen before. It contrasted sharply with the antique and well polished look of his father's old home, and didn't come close to the eerie or unsettling atmosphere of Bellatrix's home.

It was open, spacious and well lit. The floor looked polished, or perhaps cleaned regularly. The walls looked pristine, yet vacant without any picture frames or decorative tables along the hallways.

It was clinical, cold yet somehow welcoming with the polished cherry and walnut moldings along the floor and windows.

"This is Rowle's estate?" Adrian asked dryly, more out of shock than confusion.

His father made a humming noise of confirmation before he started walking, not glancing to see if Adrian was following.

Lutain contently plopped down, exploring the area with his flickering tongue. The estate didn't have the hidden passages he and Nagini frequented before, although he seemed happy with the new area and sudden freedom.

"I assume you've mastered your Animagus form?"

"Er, yes." Adrian blinked, hurrying to catch up. His shoes echoed an obscene amount, he was lucky to not have brought his boots that clicked twice as loud as normal, "A while back. I'm a snake of some sort."

His father didn't sound surprised, or if he had even heard.

"We hide in the tunnels throughout the school," Lutain added cheerfully, *"Nowhere we cannot go."*

His father paused contemplatively, "I was not aware the plumbing system was so expansive."

Adrian's body *flushed* with joy over learning something his father hadn't know, "Yes! They- I think they somehow link the plumbing to the ventilation network. Lutain and I haven't run into any water, but we're positive we're in the pipes."

His father hummed, blinking deep in thought. "That's excellent to know."

Adrian flushed once more, feeling the heat rise in his cheeks. He ducked his head, trying to hide the infectious grin which split across his face.

They ascended stairs, wide and extravagant with a thick wooden banister. On the second floor, the hallway branched into wings, separated by a single large ballroom.

"The North Wing connects to the far side of the ballroom," His father explained, not stopping his steps as he passed the large empty threshold towards the far door, just under the small balcony, "I intend for a meeting to be conducted here, your animagus form would be adequate disguise if you wish to join anonymously."

Adrian's heart beat in his chest painfully loud, pulsing almost strong enough to rattle his teeth, "I could join?"

His father didn't clarify, instead he passed through the door and into another hallway which assuredly was the far side of the North Wing.

"I have important matters to address." his father spoke sharply, already moving towards what likely was an office, "I assume you can find your quarters?"

"Yes, father." Adrian nodded happily, peering around and already taking note of their location.

His father left, closing the door behind him which rattled in its frame, silencing the hallway.

"It smells of wood here." Lutain sighed, huffing loudly as he flicked his tongue at a walnut baseboard.

"That's because you're licking wood." Adrian retorted, feeling as light as a feather with his abundant and free use of parseltongue.

Adrian explored the estate, which was barren of life. Even Nagini was nowhere to be found, although she may have been sleeping inside his father's office. Lutain followed him through his investigation, even as he ventured outside into the snow to search out the nearest owlery.

Adrian's room was in a unique location, although it was highly impractical for most. It was small, something he was sure Draco would flat out grimace at. On the far side of the room, there was a spiral staircase which looked unnervingly precarious, although it did hold a sort of artistic aesthetic with its wooden twisting design.

All of Adrian's strange collectibles he had gathered and stored at his father's manner were here as well, placed carefully in an expansive curio cabinet on the far wall. The second level had a bed, larger than any he had owned before. His trunk was near the wall, the one that stored his various cloaks and robes as well as the older version of his cerastes outfit before he had outgrown it. A

wardrobe stood tall, its deep shades of red matched the cherry splashed intermittently around the entire estate. His collection of teeth and claws and skulls and other odd bits would have fit in well, he missed them.

Adrian discovered quite quickly, that the extravagant set of doors across from his bed actually led out to the balcony he had spotted in the ballroom.

"This is so inconvenient," Adrian laughed in surprise, running his fingers over the wooden railing, "What architect created a super small hidden bedroom, that leads out into a *ballroom?"*

"Someone who is stupid," Lutain confirmed, although his tone of voice implied heavily he didn't really understand the situation.

Adrian snorted flatteringly, rolling his shoulders and positively *skipping* back inside his room. The doors to the balcony closed with a shutter, rattling on the frame. Adrian launched himself onto his bed, collapsing onto the bouncing mattress before he started tearing the sheets with excited fingers.

They were nice sheets too, they flexed and barely stretched no matter how hard he tugged.

"I missed this," Adrian sighed contently, throwing one arm over his eyes as he collapsed back into the blankets, "Being here, I mean."

Lutain made a non-confirmation sound, halfway between a hiss and a hum.

"It's nice being here. I don't have to be careful, especially with Draco and Greengrass." Adrian enthused contently, sighing out in bliss as his spine cracked loudly. "I can just learn spells, do what I want, train, and just…"

Lutain slithered across the bed. He didn't say anything, he didn't need to.

Christmas passed and with it, Adrian began to fret and fumble around the house in search of wrapping paper.

Of course, there was none, yet that didn't stop Adrian's frantic search.

Nagini and Lutain watched amused, leaving dry commentary as Adrian nearly ransacked one room, only to magically repair it and move onto the next. They became a steady mantra, a calm background to his rising anxiety.

"Is that a bird?" Lutain asked curiously.

"A dead bird, humans stuff them with feathers and put them on tables." Nagini wisely interjected, both snakes watching as Adrian hurled an antique victorian stuffed finch over his left shoulder.

"Humans are so strange," Lutain added with a strange sense of fondness.

"They keep such strange things," Nagini agreed, tilting her head to taste the air, *"Master keeps a bag of my skin."*

Lutain looked alarmed, *"What? Why does he keep your skin? Is he supposed to keep your skin? Master! Master, why do you not keep my skin-"*

Adrian grunted as a wicker chair nearly fell on him from where it was stacked in the closet, *"Lutain this is really not the time."*

"Yes this is the time. Now is a good time. A perfect time. Answer the question."

"Answer the question," Nagini cooed on, her own lilting voice added in.

"Answer the question," Lutain continued, the two snakes alternating demands, gradually rising in volume until they were near singing it at him in tone deaf hisses.

"You don't even care about the question," Adrian bemoaned, flicking his wand to return the chaotic mess to its original place, *"You just want to annoy me."*

"You took the rat man. You brought this upon yourself." Nagini wisely imputed, before pointedly swinging her tail to knock a broom down to the floor.

Adrian started, watching it clatter and bounce. He blinked, lifting one hand to rub at the bridge of his nose, *"Why? Why would you do that."*

Nagini opened her mouth in a strange pulled expression, something uncomfortably similar to a human grin.

"Stop that." Adrian barked, shivering slightly as even Lutain seemed horrified by her expression. Nagini of course, continued her weird gummy smile.

Adrian quickly found that there was no wrapping paper in the entire building. He settled for parchment, folded carefully many times to disguise the shape of the locket.

It was strange, ever since arriving the locket appeared almost calm. It hadn't acted out in days. Adrian almost found himself missing the indiscernible whispers, the vibrating touch and the lulling sense of sedation it gave him.

All of the hassle of keeping it hidden was well worth it when he saw his father hesitantly unwrap the paper; moving disjointedly slow almost as if he knew what it was before the parchment fell away.

The gold on the outer casing almost shimmered, reflecting lamplight and scarlet eyes which hungrily took it in.

"Where did you find this?" his father asked him calmly, holding it reverently as if a precious gemstone. He held it as if the heart of something precious, beating gently like a newborn child.

Adrian smiled, and told him what he knew.

Adrian received his own present, a few books half hazardous set on his bed with no note or letter. He had expected something similar, his father wasn't one to invest in making an extravagant gift for a child he hadn't seen in a long time.

'Remus would have given you a better gift' Adrian thought to himself, hurriedly pushing such blasphemous ideas out before he could linger on them further.

Lutain wasn't interested as much in the books, instead for Christmas the snake invited him in races all throughout the manner.

Nagini joined in. Adrian spent hours chasing the two through the hallways and staircases, relaxed and finally free to do what he pleased.

Skylar Potter quietly opened Remus' door, sliding inside and shuffling over the worn rug.

Remus didn't look, instead he remained curled on an armchair, staring into a fire which burned lowly in its fireplace.

Skylar cleared his throat quietly, setting a brown paper bag on the nearest table, "Remus?"

The werewolf didn't look up, but his chest heaved with a heavy sigh.

Skylar gently lowered himself into a chair, pulling his legs up tight as if to fight off the winter chill.

"I keep thinking if I wait long enough, he'll Floo me, even though it's impossible." Remus spoke, his voice was quiet, but hoarse.

Skylar didn't need to ask as to who he was talking about.

"You know," Sylar coughed quietly, "He's...He's like a Vipertooth." Skylar spoke quietly.

Remus looked over curiously, dark circles under his eyes.

Skylar swallowed and continued, feeling more confident the longer he spoke, "Like the Vipertooth I fought. Quick, cunning, and unlike any other dragon I've ever seen."

Remus' lip twitched, encouraging Skylar to continue.

"It was tricky, and it fought unlike normal dragons, and- and in the end it's still a wild creature." Skylar licked his dry lips, "He- you could coddle it every day of its life, but in the end it's a wild creature and it bites when threatened."

Remus' hairline smile faltered as he looked back at the fire, "I keep wondering if It was something *I* did. Is that why he ran off?"

Skylar shifted uncomfortably, "No, I… I don't know. I was, ah, I was with him the day he ran off-"

"Apparated." Remus broke the quiet, "Albus and I decided that he apparated off the school grounds through a passageway."

Skylar froze in surprise, why hadn't he thought of that? He knew that Adrian could apparate, he had told everyone in Hogsmede that he could. Skylar hadn't thought of it as a security risk.

"He- he was upset." Skylar quietly added, "He- I saw him before. We were in the, we were in a room and something upset him. I...He can see thestrals. But he…" Skylar's voice cracked badly in the room, "Remus, I think he killed someone."

Remus stiffened very suddenly, and sighed quietly through his nose.

"Albus and I decided it was best to not tell you about our suspicions, but I feel it's hypocritical to not involve you when…" Remus sighed and rubbed at his eyes with the pals of his hands, "We know. Or Albus suspects something similar."

Skylar's blood ran cold, "What?"

"Adrian Selwyn shouldn't exist, and he doesn't in all of the registry. Sirius investigated the Ministry records before he was fired for trespassing and looking at confidential information, Adrian Selwyn doesn't *exist.*" Remus confessed quietly, "Given what he's mentioned in passing about living with a father, and then claiming to live with Bellatrix Lestrange...there are many facts which don't line

up." Remus continued as if his words weren't changing Skylar's perception of everything, "Albus checked for curse scars and...Adrian Selwyn has multiple."

Skylar felt dizzy, he didn't know what to think.

"We've speculated that there is a high possibility that Adrian Selwyn in a fit of accidental magic murdered his birth parents at a young age." Remus sighed exhaustedly, "Likely then Bellatrix or another party found him and placed him with this mysterious father of him."

"So she would continue to come back and check on him. But...but when she was in Azkaban..." Skylar trailed off, feeling as if he had been punched in the chest.

"We believe that Adrian is currently placed in a surrogate household, selected by Bellatrix herself. With that in mind, we've been investigating every household we can but we aren't that hopeful to find where Adrian is."

Skylar floundered, a wordless squeak breaking out of his throat, "I-"

"Don't worry yourself, Skylar," Remus smiled tiredly, "I have an idea of Adrian's surrogate father at this time, I had a glimpse of him during the Boggart I brought in for the class lesson."

"Adrian's boggart is his *dad?"*

"In hindsight I had anticipated it being Bellatrix Lestrange. This only helps our assumption that Adrian's surrogate family is equally abusive, and violent. We also believe that Adrian has, in some form, been groomed to be equally volatile."

Remus gave a small nod, staring into the fireplace quietly, "Based on this, Albus and I have already discussed the possibility that Adrian Selwyn will attempt to kill me."

"*What,* Moony *no*- you *can't-"*

"Skylar," Remus snapped quickly, running a hand exhaustedly over his face, "He...Albus has been keeping me notified. Do you remember your fourth year, when you, Adrian, and Draco Malfoy got in a fight on the grounds."

Skylar felt as if he was falling through the couch, "The...the one where Adrian punched Draco?"

Remus' hands clenched around the armrests of the chair, "Skylar, Adrian fractured Draco's skull with his bare hands. There were reports, hospital files, of Adrian setting other students on fire in his *first year."*

Skylar looked horrible, "He set the room we were in on fire also, he...he wasn't thinking. It just...I thought it was an accident."

"He's also inhibited a far greater affinity and ease with dark magic than we're comfortable with. Albus and I discussed removing Adrian from the school, for the safety of the other students."

"No, I- He's my *friend."* Skylar choked out in alarm, "You can't-"

"We're afraid that Bellatrix Lestrange or someone else is watching him, and removing him from the school would result in the curse scar activating. That, or whatever reason he's attending Hogwarts won't be applicable."

"Activating?" Skylar echoed weakly, "*applicable?"*

"Skylar…" Remus looked very obviously pained, "We're thinking Adrian may be cursed as a weapon to be used against you. He likely was allowed to come to Hogwarts to spy on you, or to get close to you for nefarious means. If we remove him, we are afraid that Bellatrix will no longer value him and dispose of him. If Adrian realizes that we're considering his removal, he may try to kill you."

"...*dispose* of him?"

"Murder. Bellatrix may murder Adrian if he does not comply to her wishes."

Skylar jumped to his feet, shaking his head viciously, "No, *no.* If you know *anything* about Adrian, he doesn't take sides. He figures out what keeps him safe, and he that stays way."

"If you're referring to the bartering system Adrian had in place-" Lupin started, cutting off his own words with a small twitch of his cheek.

"Not that! If you *ever* think he'd just- he'd just roll over for someone then...then you don't know him at all!"

Lupin flinched and his nostrils flared, "I like to presume that I *do* understand Adrian, believe it or not."

Skylar formed a glare directed at Remus. He knew that he had gone too far, that his words were uncalled for. He wouldn't feel guilty for them now; he grabbed the package he had originally brought into the room, "He's a Vipertooth, Moony. Stop treating him like something fragile."

Without any hesitation, Skylar tossed the package carefully over to the older man. Remus snatched it, cradling it questioningly as Skylar stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

The fire popped and crackled, sending small embers flying as Remus gently opened the brown paper, reaching inside with gentle fingers.

A model dragon- the model dragons from Skylar's first task.

A little Vipertooth hissed on his palm, snapping and looking as uniquely dangerous as Adrian ever was.

'I know I'm stronger. I can see it, I can feel it. There's proof, there's so much proof and somehow...I don't know. I don't feel stronger. I feel terrible.'

"I know you told me to stay away, but the more I find out the more fascinating he is." Astoria mused, holding a roll of parchment in her hands as she leant against the doorway.

"If you're talking about Selwyn, I'm going to jinx you." Daphne warned with a low huff, fastening her hair in place. Astoria turned her wide eyes on her sister, blinking in mock confusion.

"I was talking with Suzie…" Astoria trailed off before shrugging, "Actually no. I wasn't talking to her but looking around-"

Daphne gave a wordless noise of frustration, "Astoria! Stop digging around!"

Astoria rolled her eyes, "You're envious since you never had the talent-"

Daphne stood and held her quill at her sister accusatory, "Astoria, do you know what Selwyn *did?"*

Astoria blinked in confusion, "Uh, when?"

"He beat Draco Malfoy until his *skull was broken."*

Astoria nodded slowly as if still unsure, "I...I know? I heard?"

"And you aren't concerned at all about all of this? You aren't worried that he isn't going to find out and dig around for you? He attacked *Draco Malfoy."*

Astoria scoffed, "It's not like he know legilimency, how would *he* know I've been looking around? I'm curious."

"Curiosity kills the Kneazle." Daphne snapped, crossing her arms as Astoria stuck out her tongue and hopped into the room, climbing onto Daphne's bed and throwing the parchment onto the floor.

"So I was thinking," Astoria started while swinging her overhanging feet, "Selwyn is really strange, you know?"

Daphne gave a small grunt, nearly kicking the smaller girl out of the room.

"...What does his snake look like?" Astoria asked out of curiosity, "I've never seen it before."

"Big, black with yellow stomach." Daphne shrugged, "Scary fast. Always wraps around him like a noose."

Astoria stiffened, her voice was slightly strained, "That's...interesting."

Daphne paused and turned to look at her sister directly, "Astoria? Astoria what's wrong?"

She wasn't looking at Daphne, instead she was gazing off as if she had realized something horrifying. "Adrian Selwyn may...be adopted, correct?"

"...Yes? We already established this, Astoria what is going *on?"*

The younger girl gave a small pinched smile, "Nothing, I ah, I need to send an owl. Thank you Daphne."

And she left, nearly shaking in her steps as she left the room.

Suzie Forestar,

I am messaging you with a rather peculiar request, one that I believe will confuse you initially. I have resources that have informed me of the unfortunate end to your late brother, David.

I understand that based on the circumstances of his unfortunate death, his murderer may have been part of the Wizarding World. Due to this, and the opportunities available to the Greengrass name and house, I hope to assist you in uncovering the murderer of your late brother.

If at all possible, I ask you to tell me the name of the child who you remember from your orphanage.

Best wishes,

Astoria Greengrass.

Suzie unrolled the letter from the prim and proper owl, watching her well behaved from the windowsill of her bedroom.

Her foster parents were confused but thankfully understanding of the situation, it was incredibly easy to orchestrate her current foster family to be a registered muggleborn and squib. Although they were not as familiar with the wizarding world, they certainly were not shocked by the owl.

What was shocking, was how well behaved and obviously pureblood the owl was.

The letter itself, was something Suzie had only imagined in nightmares.

She sat on her bed, cross legged as the owl watched her movements patiently. The parchment was sprawled in front of her, crinkled already from how often she had opened and closed it.

She knew who Astoria Greengrass was, another girl in her year who bordered a line of malicious and too sly to talk with. She was...intimidating, far too innocent looking and far too dangerous.

She was nice enough, but the fact that she sent the letter to begin with meant something terrible.

She was an orphan in the eye of the Wizarding world, and since she wasn't formally adopted during the school year she was the custody of Hogwarts school. Given that she was sorted into Slytherin, technically her guardian was Professor Snape.

"Okay, okay," She exhaled, scrambling over the bland desk in the makeshift room for a decent ballpoint pen and paper, "I just...I just need to tell Professor Snape about this…"

She scribbled, pausing and crumpling the paper once to throw it behind her and to restart.

"Professor Snape.

I was given a letter recently asking about what happened to my brother, David, who died years ago in my old orphanage.

I don't know how, but somehow someone has been asking after the name of the person who killed my brother. My brother was killed by a snake, or rather, my brother was killed by a boy who told the snake to kill him. From what I've heard Parseltongue is rare, but it isn't anything like what Skylar Potter was sounding like. This sounded like actual hisses, like there was a snake in his mouth.

I know the boy's name was Harry. He was mean, cruel, he threw me down stairs and he told his snake to bite and murder my brother.

I think I remember a woman who looked like the escaped convict Bellatrix Lestrange, but I could be wrong. They set the orphanage on fire and a lot of people died.

I'm afraid that someone may be looking for me, but I don't know if this is important enough to ask the Headmaster about. I'm scared with all the questions that somehow someone is going to get me.

Thank you so much,

Suzie Forestar.

Severus Snape sighed through his nose as he looked at the paper- clumsily written with a muggle ballpoint pen.

Even more confusing, the owl that had delivered it undoubtedly belonged to a pureblood family. It was far too well trained, and looked positively expensive for any student to own, let alone a orphaned muggleborn.

The contents of the note were even worse; written in haste and in a young child's fear.

Unfortunately, the contents were incredibly concerning.

Albus was gone- off chasing a lead that was too important to inform Severus of. It was understandable, considering that if pressed for specific information, his Occlumency barriers would never last. It was better to be uninformed than to know pivotal details.

Since Albus was gone and was impossible to contact, the contents of the letter were left to Severus to report.

The information...the fact the letter in itself mentioned Bellatrix, one of the Dark Lord's loyal followers, Severus was instantly at an obligation to share the letter to his supporters. Not only that, but the pressing matter of another parselmouth on the loose suggested that there could possibly be a young wizard with complicated abilities.

But to suggest that there was a child that was abducted by Bellatrix...no, that was *impossible.*

Unless...unless the false story given to the Order by that one obnoxious child was actually *true.* If that was the case, then Adrian was actually *Harry* or some other ridiculous name.

But that's preposterous, it was likely that if Bellatrix was abducting children nearly a decade ago, then she likely stole many. So far, the idea that Bellatrix captured many children and 'trained' each hoping for a single survivor was much more her style.

Albus was going to have a field day when Severus gave his suspicions, and no doubt he would search the missing child reports to try and find some sort of linkage.

But if Bellatrix had abducted children from *orphanages,* the search would be much much more difficult.

It was best to simply leave the letter with someone after making a copy for Albus. It was incredibly unlikely that the Dark Lord would order anything in haste, especially given that these events took place in his absence. Likely anything actually targeting the girl would be long planned out, or dismissed as a worried child.

But...if a pureblood house was drawn into the mess, then Severus would have to act fast and move quickly to deliver the letter to make sure he didn't look suspicious. He already was on shaky grounds, and was well aware that he was being kept in the dark in some fashion.

Perhaps sending this letter to the dark lord would in some way assure his position?

Severus Snape sighed, pressing one hand against his eyes as he drew his wand, already murmuring the spell to duplicate the parchment.

Almost instantly afterwards, he pressed his wand to the seared black mark against his flesh, feeling the burn as if a viper had sunk its fangs deep.

He hissed in pain, stumbling upwards and while focusing through the searing burn, apparated away.

The training room was impressive. Much better and more elaborate than the one Adrian had grown up using.

There were dummies, able to walk around and dodge with a level of animation that was quite startling. Targets and contraptions that moved at varying speeds, even devices that would shoot curses that were positively painful. Adrian had been already knicked by one dark cutting curse, falling to the ground in crippling agony. There had been an unsettlingly large puddle of blood, spewing out from his leg in pulsing waves.

There was something impossible to explain, about seeing blood leaking from his body. A comfort in knowing that what he was made of on the inside was the same as everyone else.

He had shifted into his Animagus form, blood slowing but thankfully, the wound transferred only to the lower part of his tail. He was able to slither over to the shelf abundant with healing potions. His skin had knit back together as he screamed, clutching his legs and wound bubbling with the hiss of of sulfur. Healing potions were not kind, they were aggressive and cruel on flesh.

His leg pulled strangely, like how the tattoo felt over his skin. Bits where the muscles had healed in a way different to normal.

Adrian had learned his lesson, injuries could be repaired instantly but he would always feel it.

This time, he knew better than to get hit.

He was very out of practice, it had been a long time since he had a honest dueling session with Bellatrix or Rowle and admittedly, he was hit quite often. The first day he let his confidence overshadow him, it resulted in his screaming pile. He hadn't known how to clean the blood stain, already sunken into the wooden floors and staining the cherry crimson.

It was a stain he looked at every day he entered the room, shucking off his outer cloak and stretching himself carefully.

It *was* a large stain. Like the stain the man bled out as Nagini tore his throat.

(He remembered it with an air of detachment. He had realized it, he had broken over the knowledge. He had killed a girl. He had killed a man. He would have to kill again.)

"Alright Lutain," Adrian breathed quietly, quelling the nausea as he pulled out his wand again- the Holly and Phoenix feather that had been hidden in his room. He had missed the feel of the warm wood, sparks leaping under his skin. "You know what to do?"

Lutain peered over lazily from the heated platform he had found for Nagini near the doorway. *"If you're an idiot fetch your father."*

Adrian's face twitched, but he couldn't really complain with the simplified information.

Adrian exhaled slowly and shifted into position, watching at the far end of the room the magical device which he knew would spit out curses the moment he activated it with a word.

He knew that he would likely leave the room injured, there was no way that he was going to not come out of it bleeding.

(Some part of him *wanted* to bleed.)

Adrian wasn't sure when, at some point a filter had lifted from his eyes. A level of childish naivety

that he never knew existed had slowly slid away. Washed away in rain over his face.

"I killed Ginny Weasley." Adrian spoke out loud, the room was silent, but something heavy pressed on his chest. Lutain didn't respond, used to Adrian's talking to himself.

"I killed Ginny Weasley." Adrian repeated, breathing out and closing his eyes. He could imagine her hair, he could *see her.*

'I killed her,' Adrian thought, feeling sick and knowing, *knowing* that she too had been made of blood and bone. *'I killed her.'*

He killed the man. He begged for mercy and he killed him.

(Had he really though? Had he *actually* killed him?)

It was Nagini who struck him down. It was the Chamber which caused the girl to starve to death.

(His father would look at him with so much *disappointment.)*

Adrian was an Animagus, some adults never accomplished that in their entire lives. Adrian had Occlumency barriers, he was a Legilimens. He was the *Boy-Who-Lived.*

"I can do this." Adrian breathed to himself, eyes still closed. The world pulsed too vibrant, too bright for him to look at.

His father always had a plan. His father had a *plan* and he had taken in Adrian and raised him and *he had a duty to his father.*

Of course, there was the fact that his father could have just taken him in to hide the fact that Adrian was indeed, the only one who had survived his father's hand. Adrian was a threat, now neutralized. With that logic, it didn't explain why Adrian had been tutored or treated well, he could have lived in a dungeon and the same would be accomplished.

But no, his father had adopted him and made Adrian his *heir.*

Adrian had a duty to do, and he *couldn't even kill someone.*

(A part of him was screaming that killing someone was unspeakable, that if he truly believed that he *hadn't* killed anyone, then there was time to *stop.)*

He had broken down, in a moment of guilt and hysteria he had *broken down* to Skylar Potter. Skylar Potter, who all his life he wanted to *kill.* He hadn't come to terms with it, he hadn't allowed himself to realize and accept the fact he *ended the existence of a human being.*

"They are prey, and they are no different than rats." Adrian murmured to himself, clutching his wand as he remembered what Nagini had said numerous times before. "They are rats and must be killed for us to live."

Truly, if Adrian didn't kill a rat for his own life to continue, than he himself would starve.

Was it truly wrong to kill something weaker than him to guarantee his own survival? Was murder *really* something so...a concept so horrid that one could never return from it?

James Potter had killed before, in the line of duty as an Auror. So had Sirius Black, and Remus even. Dumbledore had killed without a doubt, and yet they were considered good.

"I can do this," Adrian breathed, hanging his head and fighting the sick that burned his throat, "I *need* to do this."

Dark magic was a tool. It could be used one way or another, you could kill with light magic just as easy as dark magic.

Dark magic was more humane, less suffering if applied properly.

"Master?'

"Actuate." Adrian clipped out, opening his eyes and twisting to the left as something fast and purple shot towards him.

Another, this time Adrian hastily shielded, grunting with a whine as it numbed his arm. Rowle had these devices set intimidatingly high.

Adrian wasn't going to lower the difficulty. Wounds would teach him to move faster, blood would reinforce his own defects.

One curse slid past his shield, slicing through his ankle and sending him to the ground with a cry.

Lutain reared in alarm, watching silently as Adrian grunted a wordless sound of pain. The device paused a second, calibrating Adrian's location before redirecting its curses.

"Master-"

"No!" Adrian hissed out, sweat plastering along his hairline as he spat out shielding charms. Ankle limp on the ground and adding to the blood of the room, "I can *do this."*

Lutain lowered, watching carefully as Adrian writhed on the defense, tears slipping from the corner of his eyes.

Another slashing curse, the smallest fraction his shield didn't cover. His calf split open like finely roasted beef. He never thought his own meat would resemble raw beef.

"Master this is-"

"No!" Adrian hissed out, spine arcing although he propped himself upwards with his forearms, clenching his jaw. The spells kept coming, and Adrian was *tired.*

He was *done* with being hurt.

He hissed out something wordless, pushing invisibly and coaxing fire to burn between him and the device, halting it barrage of spells. Taking three seconds to simply *breathe*, he dragged himself into an almost sitting position.

Fire burned, searing the room and creating an opaque barrier. Adrian didn't need to see to know where the device was.

"Ruptura!" Adrian hissed out, snapping his wrist as the long fire whip sprouted from his wand tip, burning purple. He slashed it through the air once, twice, until he heard the device break with a whine. Adrian banished the spell, breathing heavily but with perfect clarity.

It had taken him too long to stop himself against the barrage, he shouldn't have been injured to begin with.

"I'm fine Lutain," Adrian clipped out, frustrated mostly with himself, "I'll take a healing potion and try again."

Lutain watched skeptic and with fascination as once again, the raw bloody meat of Adrian's leg knitted together until a thin lumpy seam remained. A permanent reminder of his own inabilities.

"Let's go again." Adrian hissed out sourly, swiping his wand through the air to loosen his shoulders.

"Use birds." Lutain offered, tail tip swaying slowly, *"Practice on birds."*

"You can't use that hex on humans," Adrian countered, not looking over as he rolled his head to stretch his neck.

"Cut them in half."

Adrian paused, a small hitch in his movements before he quietly summoned the birds. Bright canaries larger than a fist. Lutain watched, spotting a few which flapped into the rafters. One unsuspecting bird remained on the floor, chirping and glancing around curiously.

"Off with your head," Adrian muttered sourly, pointing his wand at the bird and pausing.

It was no different than bursting the birds. There was no difference.

Adrian inhaled.

(*The man's throat was-)*

"Abrumpo."

The bird stiffened and dropped, it's head dropping as from the blunt end of its severed neck, blood spurted like a macabre fountain.

Adrian thought there would have been a moment after that. A clean snap of rationality that would strike when he killed something. A bludger to the skull, a ringing in his ears.

The remaining birds chattered in the rafters, unsuspecting.

"That was fun."

Adrian ducked his head, staring at the floor.

It was no different than bursting birds. It was no different than slicing their heads off. The spells were no different, *curses* were no different.

"Lutain," Adrian's voice came out with a small, unidentifiable lilt to it, "I want to try the Imperious curse."

Rowle paused from his chair the moment he felt the wards bend- a presence following the subconscious directions given by the mark.

They had been keyed into the main ballroom where all future Death Eater meetings would take place.

He sighed, standing slowly if only to not alarm the gigantic python that was curled up in the

corner. Its name was Nagini, but everyone knew that it was the Dark Lord's eyes and ears.

It's head lifted almost instantly in response, jaw dropping with a rattling hiss that make the hair on Rowle's arms stand on end.

"I- someone's apparated here." He explained lowly, making only slow movements to return the book he was reading to the side table. He made no movements for his wand. He had been told that the snake understood English, it was probably smart to let it know what he was doing. It looked far too intelligent for an animal, and watched him calmly.

Rowle hurried out from the library, the snake following him distantly before splitting and heading in an alternate direction. The idea of that giant man-eater following him all the way to the ballroom was terrifying.

Rowle opened the doors, walking through and immediately brightened with a grin, "Well well, look what the kneazle dragged in."

Severus Snape's lip curled but his expression stayed trademark bland, "Thorfinn Rowle. How...unexpected."

Rowle gave a rolling shrug of his shoulders, if Snape didn't know where he was then Rowle wasn't going to correct him. Snape had been one Death Eater that was always under suspicion, especially since his spy status with the others.

"Why are you here, Snape?" Rowle asked cautiously, crossing both arms with one eyebrow raised.

Snape's face stayed blank, "I have a message for our Lord, one that may be of concern."

"Oh really." Rowle sarcastically responded, "One of your students mixing poisons in a loo?"

Snape blinked slowly and in the patronizing way he seemed to have mastered. "Unfortunately, no."

Something heavy plopped to the ground- drawing both eyes along the floor until they saw whatever it was that had drawn attention.

The gigantic snake, Nagini, had emerged again, this time another serpent in tow. Her entire bulk slid out of a hinged vent, propped open around her girth.

The newer snake that accompanied her was smaller, although was still terrifyingly large. It likely was the right size to eat a small owl.

It was dark in color, some shade of dark green or grey that Rowle didn't care enough to know. It was fast, with a strange frill tucked firm against its neck, starting just between its eyes.

Snape's breathing stilled the moment he saw it, as if he recognized the species. He instantly averted his eyes, staring fixed at Rowle.

'That's new.' Rowle blinked leisurely, *'must not like being spied on for once.'*

"The Lord isn't here right now, although I could pass along the message if it's actually important." Rowle tilted his head slightly, eyes half lidded as if mocking. The snake, Nagini, would report it for him.

"It *is* important, unlike your contributions." Snape responded with a dull drawl, "Information given to me which details the possibility of another parselmouth in our midst."

Rowle's eyebrows shot up, "Bloody hell, *another* one?"

Snape paused, halfway withdrawing a piece of parchment, "It appears so."

The smaller snake hissed, neither man looked towards it.

Rowle took the parchment, wrinkling his nose as he squinted at the chicken scratch, "Merlin, what sort of quill made this mess?"

"A pen, I believe. A muggle writing utensil." Snape sighed at Rowle's brief look of confusion, "Written to me by a student. I doubt it is of concern but as it does contain sensitive information I believe it best if brought to attention."

Rowle frowned and looked at the name at the bottom, "What sort of name is 'Forestar' anyways?"

There was a loud agitated hiss, Snape paled slightly as he forced his eyes downward.

Something was snapping and crackling, like a brute stomping through broken twigs. Rowle and Snape looked more out of fascination than concern as the smaller snake twisted and distorted before their eyes, shifting into something shapeless with a long black cloak.

Well, Merlin be damned, the kid managed it.

He hadn't seen the outfit often, but he had been drilled as to how to act.

Rowle lowered his eyes, trying to quell the sense of grudging respect at a damn Animagus transformation, "cerastes." He murmured, bowing his head.

He hadn't seen the kid in a long while. He had wondered where he had run off to.

There was a pause as Snape clearly did not follow suit, only peering at the newcomer with wide eyes.

Nagini let out a large noise, something agitated by the sight of her twitching tail.

Cerastes was walking, managing the distance from where he stood next to Nagini. Only a few strides, accentuated by the obnoxiously clicking heels of his boots. Although Rowle knew the kid was essentially harmless, something about the slow walk and clicking shot an instinctual pang of anxiety through him.

"The note." cerastes murmured, voice sliding out of Rowle's head like a notice-me-not charm on his voice, as slick as oil running off a surface. Impressive charm work, likely made by the Dark Lord himself.

Rowle held out the letter obediently, nearly biting his tongue as Cerastes (*the boy!)* took it from his hands with black gloved fingers. (Of course, the scars on his skin.)

cerastes read the note. He trailed one gloved black finger along the paper, under the hastily written letters. Near the end, his one hand was shaking, the other twitching as if wanting to curl into a fist.

Then with a sharp smell, the paper started to curl inwards on itself, turning black and then red as it smoldered, *burning* without a spell being cast.

Snape shifted his weight ever so slightly, the raising and lowering of his chest halted entirely. Rowle bit his cheek to contain the grin from spreading across his face. He knew enough of Severus' tells to know the other man was *horrified* at the wandless magic.

"Suzie Forestar," Cerastes murmured, turning to look at Nagini.

The massive snake looked content, flicking its tongue with low hissing noises interspersed here or there.

"Get rid of her." cerastes spoke, voice bland and cold.

Snape's eyes widened slightly, "I...Excuse my confusion, I am not certain that this should be decided without our Lord's-"

Cerastes' voice was sharp and *angry,* "Did you mishear me? I said get *rid of her."*

Rowle glanced between the two, a low light of amusement burning in his eyes, "I'm surprised Severus, you haven't met cerastes?"

Rowle knew damned well the other man hadn't.

"Charmed." Severus offered in place of a greeting, still looking at Cerastes with a level of skepticism.

"Wonderful we have that out of the way." Cerastes deadpanned, nearly making Rowle bark out loud, although he did try to muffle it into his fist, "This girl knows too much and has proven to be a loose end. I want her gone, get rid of her in some way or another."

Snape blinked in alarm before stilling, "I believe a decision of such calibre should only be made by our Lord-"

cerastes spun, the cloak flared but didn't open or reveal anything, "I'll inform my father of this when he returns but for now *get rid of her."*

The cloaked figure didn't hiss, but sounded very close to it. Severus stilled once more, this time it took him longer to resume breathing.

"As you wish," Rowle grumbled calmly and almost *smugly,* "Come on Snape, I assume you know where this girl lives then?"

Snape looked pale, uncomfortable or horrified with the turn of events, "I- cerastes I must insist-"

cerastes angled the pitch black bottomless cavern of his hood to look directly at Snape. It was impossible to look inside the darkness. It was unsettling in Rowle's opinion.

Snape choked, a quiet noise that Rowle wouldn't have heard if not for the close proximity.

Snape jerked his head down, "As you wish."

So it seemed he finally understood.

"Wonderful." cerastes breathed slowly, as if to reassure himself. He looked at the twice damned giant snake and started *hissing.* Unmistakable foreign sounding noises, bordering on something able to comprehend but too animalistic in truth. Real Parseltongue spoken from a source.

Snape twitched, but thankfully didn't speak.

Cerastes left the room in a flurry. Snape didn't look back once.

"You did the right idea." Nagini enthused, following Adrian closely as he left the ballroom, heading through the hallways.

"I know." Adrian bit out, tone difficult to discern with the charmed hood.

"They are rats." Nagini comforted, as if Adrian needed it.

The worst part was that he *did.* A small part of him was crying out, saying that it was *wrong* to send Rowle after her.

She had *ruined everything,* but knowing Snape, if she was truly important she would live. The way Adrian viewed it was rather twisted, he'd admit. Snape worked for the light, if the concept of life and not killing children was *truly* a concept that could never be broken, then Suzie wouldn't die.

If she did, then the idea of murder wasn't truly that unspeakable of an action.

Either he received Suzie from Rowle, and he would have the opportunity to kill her himself, or Rowle would kill her with assistance from Snape which implied that all of Adrian's concerns were entirely pointless afterall.

"I'm sure you could stri-"

"Do you know how to activate the training rooms."

Nagini stilled in her movements, lagging a few strides before she caught up smoothly. *"I know how to activate for my Master."*

"My father's training level." Adrian breathed out in slight resignation, "alright, help me with it."

"Are you sure? It is very advanced."

"How advanced?"

"Destruction of all. Very difficult."

Adrian nodded in thought. He would end up very injured. The training room had extensive healing potions, of course they pulled painfully when the cold outdoors caught him off guard. It wouldn't hurt to train more, to get *used* to that level of activity.

He only had so much time before he had to go back. (He didn't want to.)

"Alright, I need you to activate them. Only deactivate them when I need healing potions, or I'm missing a limb."

"Do you miss limbs often?"

"Bellatrix was a bitch."

Rowle knew that when cerastes said to get rid of the girl, he meant capture her.

Rowle *also* knew, that keeping a girl hostage especially with the information she had written in a letter, that she knew too much to be left alive. cerastes- no, *Adrian* was too naive to understand the complication of the phrase, or actually what it would entitle.

'Get rid of her.'

"Sorry girl," Rowle grinned, pointing his wand at the shaking and sobbing girl in front of him- likely not even fourteen yet, "but you were digging around and asking the wrong questions."

She screamed, until a flash of green and she didn't scream any longer.

Severus stood guard outside the house, lips pinched and face once more a blank mask.

"Do you have a death wish?"

Adrian didn't bother lifting his head, keeping his forehead pressed against the wooden floor. It wasn't that much colder, but it felt like pure relief against his feverish skin.

When it was obvious Adrian wasn't going to answer, his father sighed quietly and strode over the distance calmly. His shoes didn't click, it was the shadow cast from his body that alerted Adrian to the close proximity.

"If I didn't know any better, I'd assume you were trying something….reckless."

Adrian nearly smiled, pausing and grunting with the exertion required to move himself into a kneeling position. "I'm still in one piece."

Is father's eyes were crimson red, like the fresh blood that had leaked from Adrian's lesions like spilled butterbeer.

The room was quiet. It smelled like smoke and burned wood, a distinctly pungent campfire smell. Undertones of something metallic, like rust. From the potions rack built into the wall, a large number of healing potions, blood replenishing potions, and energizing tinctures were missing.

"When do I get to kill Skylar?"

His father shifted his weight, crossing his arms in a way that impossibly *still* looked fluid. "Kill Skylar Potter? My, aren't you ambitious."

Adrian's face twitched into the beginnings of a snarl. He ducked his head, neck stiff, to mask his expression in his sweat matted hair.

"My plans never counted on your involvement in Skylar Potter's death."

Adrian flinched, "I- but father I-"

"Truthfully I doubt you possess the capabilities at this time."

Adrian's jaw clenched and he kept his head ducked, "I know for certain that my magic capabilities surpass his."

Voldemort's mouth twitched, only one corner into what Adrian could only describe as a leer. "That is true. Yet the large picture is too complex for you to comprehend, child."

Adrian flushed and hid his face once again. Shame burned sourly.

"Skylar Potter functions at this time as the symbol for the light." Voldemort sighed, as if the very concept of it was unsightly. "The removal of him at this time would only cause future uprisings or complications."

"We can deal with those-"

"*We?"* Voldemort echoed back, a tone of disbelief sharply prominent, almost breathlessly amused, "hold your tongue, child. There is no *we."*

Adrian breathed slowly, closing his eyes and swallowing down the lump in his throat. "Would it not be better if I killed Dumbledore-"

"Don't make me laugh. Ridding us of that old fool is far beyond your meager abilities."

Adrian bit his cheek hard enough he tasted blood.

"I- I could surprise him…"

"No, you couldn't. Any actions against him will reveal your loyalties and cost *me."*

"I'm smarter than that." Adrian mumbled sourly, swallowing down mucus and iron.

"Considering I found you curled in your own blood and sweat, I truly am doubting your mental capabilities."

Adrian flinched again, knowing better than to speak.

Voldemort glanced around the training room, taking in the relative disarray of the floor and training dummies. "You've been focusing on pyrotechnical magic."

Adrian gave a small curt laugh, something dry and loathing before he lifted his head. He didn't bother looking at his father, instead he looked at one of the remaining dummies. A second passed, a thin rivulet of blood dripped down from Adrian's left nostril.

The dummy burst into fire, a contained burning fire that within moments, ate through the thick leather. The stuffing followed, crumbling to ash until the wooden support post slowly was revealed. Abruptly, the fire cut off, leaving the central post singed but intact; the dummy had burned away.

Adrian's father said nothing, yet in the strange way Adrian always knew what his father was feeling, he could tell he was impressed and surprised.

"You've improved since your lessons with Rowle," his father stated, not a question yet not a compliment either.

Adrian gave a small nod, looking down at where his nails dug into the wooden floorboards, "I've been practicing."

"Curious, why you selected wandless magic of all things. I was certain you'd follow dear Bella's...*enthusiasm*, for cutting curses."

Adrian gave a small roll of his shoulder, "I'm decent at those as well."

His father laughed, a low rolling noise that twisted something in Adrian's stomach. Adrian wanted to leave, he wanted to walk away very quietly.

He didn't of course, because in as long as he could remember, his father had never outright hurt him. Of course, he had cursed him and wounded him but he hadn't...*hurt* him.

Before, Adrian would have thought it was...no, before Adrian had longed for something as sweet as affection. He knew rationally that his father was not the sort to irrevocably adore Adrian, which meant (as much as it pained him) his father had a use for him.

"What's my purpose?" Adrian asked quietly, shifting into a seated position, staring at the burned post. The aftermath of his anger.

His father smiled ever so slightly, how had Adrian ever interpreted it as something kind?

"That's a rather...complex question. With a more intricate answer."

Adrian had thought as much. A lot of parts of his life were difficult to explain, twisted and veiled by childhood bias.

"Is it because I'm the actual Boy-Who-Lived?"

The room seemed to chill, something in Adrian's head thrummed painfully.

"You best keep that information to yourself, child. You never know if….*unpleasant people* may take offence."

Adrian knew a threat when he heard one. Adrian almost smiled, so that *was* part of it.

"You are in a unique position, child." His father spoke calmly, "a unique weapon that will shift our tide in the war positively."

Adrian once thought that meant he would be trained for fighting, an unstoppable force to be reckoned with. Serving as his father's right hand, raining punishment on opposition.

He hadn't even *close* to enough formal training to be a decent threat. Why would he be sent to Hogwarts if he was to be a *weapon?*

"I'm information, aren't I?" Adrian asked, voice bland in the quiet. "The fact I exist is the weapon in itself. I'm not meant to fight, I'm a political weapon."

"You must have been speaking with Adalonda, I had believed such insight beyond you."

Adrian twitched against the jibe, but knew it was true.

Adrian was never meant to kill Skylar, he was meant to...to...to *look pretty.* To *exist,* that's why his father instilled the Occlumency barriers, taught him shielding and dodging. Why he sent him to Hogwarts.

What use was Adrian if Dumbledore had no idea who he was? It would only make the...the *great reveal* that much sweeter to his father.

Adrian was a *pawn.*

"My animagus form?" Adrian asked, already knowing how dismissive his father would act.

"Useful I will admit, granted that it is a serpent as you have said. Convenient for spying, and staying with Nagini."

Ah, that was it. His father viewed him like he viewed Nagini.

His father did not cherish Adrian like family, he cherished him like a trophy.

(That didn't mean that Adrian couldn't make sure he was prized above all others.)

Albus Dumbledore sighed through his nose, exhausted and tired as he removed his half moon spectacles to rub a weathered knuckle against his sore eyes.

"And you're certain of this?" Albus asked tiredly.

Snape stood in half shadow of a bookcase, more pale and tired than he had appeared in a long while, "I'm positive."

Albus sighed quietly, "Then we are in a worse position then I feared."

He folded his hands, resting them gently on the worn prophet page, the fifth page without a photo to accompany the article header, *Fourteen-Year-Old-Witchl-Murdered-In-Home!*

"He spoke Parseltongue, Albus. I didn't mishear it."

Dumbledore nodded carefully, "Then our suspicions were correct, although I'm not positive how many threats we may be facing. I am now certain, that this...cerastes you encountered was the same threat James and Sirius encountered numerous years ago in the Forbidden Forest. Merlin knows his age, or how many...trials, came before that individual."

Snape inhaled slowly, "Your suspicions over Selwyn's eventual-"

"Nothing has changed, although I believe he may be in more danger than we originally assumed. I believe Bellatrix Lestrange's project on raising multiple...living weapons is successful. For now, we have only found two but perhaps Tom has ordered dozens to be raised."

"You still assume that we should not take custody over the boy."

"I believe acting hastily will only prompt the child into more violence. I do not believe in the morality of stealing away a child, Severus. No matter the risk."

Snape gave a sigh through his nose, "The accidental magic-"

"Oh Severus," Dumbledore shook his head quietly and sadly, "You do not believe that fate was kind to that child. It is no accidental magic, my friend."

Snape wisely said nothing.

"I believe," Dumbledore sighed quietly, "That we have made a grave error."

Caiman

Chapter Summary

Where the pieces start to fit together, where Adrian makes a deal, and something is very, very wrong.

Chapter Notes

Double chapter again!
The next chapter will be the end of Part 2.
I hope you all enjoy this treat in your frantic exam study sessions.

'I can cast anything, I know I can. I mean, I mean I can. I'm not struggling in classes, I mean I can do the spellwork. I can do it. I can cast anything. I can do it.'

Adrian slipped back into Hogwarts like rain on a sunny day.

Unsuspecting, invisible in the daylight, and unfathomably sad.

The welcome back feast was a somber affair, candles lit with a dim glow as Albus Dumbledore stood at his pedestal with a grave expression. Dolores Umbridge looked content and gleeful, wand resting on the table in front of her, as if the concerns of those beneath her were pleasantries.

"It is a pleasure to welcome you all back from your holiday break, although all news cannot be joyful in such a trying time." Dumbledore started, his voice resonating throughout the hall.

"It has come to my attention, that once more in our halls, a student has failed to join us, and forever will be unable to. Suzie Forestar, a fourth year Slytherin student, was found murdered in her home by dark forces."

Dolores Umbridge leaned forward obviously, as if moving for her wand. Dumbledore ignored it with grace.

"I find it my duty, as a headmaster and as a human being, to consider the danger we live in, and remember those who have passed far too soon beyond our help and wishes."

'Get rid of her!'

Adrian flinched, head held low.

"And I want to remind you all, to stay vigilant. And to remember those, who have left us."

'Let her starve to death.'

Adrian slowly lifted his head, breathed in and then out.

He felt peace, the small slow acceptance of something much greater than him. A sense of humbleness in wake of something much larger than him; a sense of comprehension and enlightenment a blind man receives seeing the sun the first time.

Through the Great Hall Adrian's eyes met silver.

Adrian inhaled.

'They are only rats.'

Adrian exhaled.

Luna Lovegood was crying quietly.

Educational Decree Number Twenty-Six.

All students are hereby banned from conversing with teachers outside of academic assignment.

"Luna, what do you think about destiny?"

"The concept? Well, I think it's a bit silly. Isn't destiny made by people?"

"What about prophecies?"

"I don't believe in them."

"Really? Even when the Ministry keeps record of prophecies? Doesn't that mean they're real?"

"What fun are prophecies if not to throw the unknown word of gods to simple swine and see what conclusions they misinterpret."

Educational Decree Number Twenty-Seven

The paper titled 'The Quibbler' is hereby banned from Hogwarts grounds and property. Any person seen reading such paper is to be immediately reported.

"Why were you never upset with me, when I hurt Draco?"

"I was, but I thought better of it. I don't like it when you hurt people."

"Do you like me?"

"Of course I do."

"So why are you so bothered by it? Why won't you let me scare the students who bully you, Luna?"

"It's not the right thing to do."

"But being bullied is the right thing?"

Educational Decree Number Twenty-Eight

All students are hereby banned from exchanging goods or merchandise in systematic order of a bartering network. Any student seen or heard of fencing such products will be immediately expelled from the grounds.

"Do you think the world is good, Luna?"

"Do you?"

"No. No I think it's actually a horrible place."

"..."

"Is it wrong to think like that?"

Daphne was a woman on a mission.

She found Adrian, curled around a book but not actually studying the content. Likely something for Defense Class- he managed to always rack up an immeasurable amount of extra assignments.

"Selwyn," She spoke in lieu of a greeting. Her tone cold and bland. Adrian jolted, looking at her with a somewhat blank expression.

No- a somewhat dead expression in his eyes.

"Greengrass," he quietly answered back, closing his eyes and keeping them shut. He had long eyelashes, she hadn't ever noticed that before.

"Did you read the paper?" Daphne asked dully, the words sour and stagnant in the air. "Or did you find out about Suzie Forestar when the Headmaster told us?"

Adrian sighed quietly, he sounded tired. Daphne noticed instantly that he didn't open his eyes, instead he looked more tired.

"I don't want to do this now, Greengrass."

"Too bad," She snapped sourly, feeling frustration and annoyance bubble in her blood. With how much she had warned Astoria, Daphne knew she shouldn't be acting so aggressive towards Adrian, especially given how dangerous he was.

She couldn't help it- Adrian always had been a bit of a jerk, an untactful arse that always left her prickling in annoyance, but that *never* justified….justified…

Daphne felt like screaming, so she settled for a sharp bite to her hissed accusation. "I *know* you always hated her, and now she's *murdered?"*

"*What!"* Adrian snapped suddenly, a complete turn from his passive expression before. His eyes widened suddenly, the whites prominent against the ghostly pallor of his skin. The red marks across his flesh, the scars, matched the small blood vessels across his eyes. His nostrils flared slightly, rhythmic to the clenching of his hands. Daphne could already imagine the flames licking at her clothing.

"Do you think *I did it?"* Adrian spit out, pupils dilated and entire body looking ready to spring. It was a violent reaction, and although Daphne knew how volatile Adrian was, even this seemed unexpected.

Daphne could hardly breathe, her lungs refusing to fill properly. *'Yes'* she thought dazed, swallowing any words she could have uttered.

Something in Adrian's expression looked tortured, like a feral dog tied to a post knowing the sun was setting. Something afraid, something animalistic, something being *hunted.*

'What could possibly terrify you, Adrian Selwyn?' Daphne thought to herself. Images of blood and bone flashed through her head, of something screaming and fire- terrible fire. Surely Adrian himself knew, that one day when he finally fractured, he would be something horrible to face.

(And yet, somehow underneath the terror, there was a sense of calm acceptance. A knowledge, or an epiphany that was still a mystery to Daphne herself.)

It was a terrifying expression.

"Suzie was a *brat* and I'm *glad* she's dead!" Adrian hissed, tilting his head sideways a noticeable angle. A strange tilt that looked like it would hurt Daphne's neck muscles. Adrian didn't even blink, maintaining a nearly bulging eye expression teetering closely to something manic.
"Is *that* what you want to hear?"

Daphne's heart beat loudly, she could scarcely inhale enough to breathe.

Adrian's expression wilted inwards in a single second. He curled in on himself, clutching the book tightly in his hands yet he didn't appear devastated. He seemed calm, serenity in chaos, "Leave me *alone,* Greengrass."

Daphne turned and walked away, all the way to the dorms where she found Astoria settled on a chair inconspicuously waiting. Astoria leapt to her feet, nearly skipping down the hall to her room, dragging Daphne behind her with a look.

The door closed and flashed blue, privacy wards locking in place. It was silly to think about, but behind the doors and the privacy wards, Daphne finally felt that she could breathe again.

"What's wrong Daphne?" Astoria asked, blinking owlishly as she peered in Daphne's eyes, "Can you show me?"

How strange, Astoria's eyes were wide like Adrian's but they didn't even begin to mirror the silent words in them.

A second passed, than two, and Astoria flinched back as if shaken.

"What is it?" Daphne asked quietly, still alarmed by the sudden twist.

"I think…" Astoria blinked wide eyed and starstruck, as if the world was about to fall apart, "I think you shouldn't talk to that boy anymore, Daphne."

'I know.'

Daphne made a noise of frustration, something anxious and *tired.* "I've been telling you that! I told you to stay away from him!"

Astoria shook her head slowly, "Daphne, I…"

"What is it, Astoria?" Daphne asked quietly. "Do we need to go to Professor Snape?"

"No." Astoria assured quickly, "That's why she's dead. She...she must have messaged someone,

which means I was *right."*

"What are you talking about?" Daphne asked, now on the verge of tears. She was just...so *tired* of all of this.

Astoria looked dazed and she sat down heavily, "He was blood adopted, by the man you saw. But it must have been him- he's...he's a parselmouth, but…"

"*What?"* Daphne hissed quietly.

Astoria turned her wide gaze on Daphne, and never had Daphne felt a chill so cold. Such a foreboding expression didn't fit on her smaller frail sister's face. Astoria was too small for this, too frail and at times Daphne thought she had a weight on her shoulders far too much for her to bare. Her eyes sometimes gazed off, and her hair was a thin whisper so shushed it left Daphne afraid that one day her sister would vanish in a strong breeze.

Her sister knew things, it made Daphne question Astoria's fervent denial over being a seer.

(Not that she needed it, she was a terror with Legilimency)

"Daphne," Astoria started, pausing and looking very very scared, "I think Adrian Selwyn... murdered Suzie Forestar's brother, and had a hand in her death as well."

"Do you remember it, when your mother died?"

"Of course I do."

"You saw it, didn't you."

"I did. It was terrible, I don't think I'll ever forget it...But I don't think about it much anymore."

"Is it wrong to forget about it? To just...stop caring about what it looks like?"

"What, death?"

"All of it, Luna."

Educational Decree Twenty-Nine gave the formal permission to replace Albus Dumbledore with Dolores Umbridge.

Never had Adrian felt so *on edge.*

It felt like every painting in the corridors watched him, eyes trailing on his form no matter where he went.

Something about it was bugging Lutain, even before break Lutain had mentioned something felt off. His familiar found more time to spend in the Chamber or on his own than around Adrian's shoulders. The serpent wasn't comfortable under such surveillance.

Skylar seemed...more difficult than usual. The boy was going out of his way to be friendly, overly nice and positive whenever the moment struck. Gentler, yet more firm on hanging out or interacting. He was...Adrian couldn't explain it. It was almost as if the boy was carefully testing him, treating him like expensive china yet at the same time- not.

It was….strange.

The next secret meeting of the DA was an endeavor to plan- delayed by multiple days due to Umbridge's oppressive eye.

When they could finally meet, it was more out of built up anxiety and stress than satisfaction.

Skylar was nearly bouncing on his feet, looking a sick shade of pale despite it all. He looked exhausted, just as everyone else.

"Hello! I'm so happy to see you all here," Skylar started, looking very relieved that so many people showed for the meeting, "Especially with Umbridge around."

Fred and George snorted, "Like we're going to listen to that-"

"-toad of a woman."

Skylar smiled, looking at every individual face until his eyes rested on Adrian. Something tightened, something in his eyes *changed* until his expression seemed unmistakably different.

"Anyways," Hermione cleared her throat loudly, hoisting herself to sit on the top of a wooden crate, sitting next to the large blackboard that had been dragged into the room, "We were thinking of defensive spells now instead of OWL level spells because we-"

"We need to protect ourselves," Skylar bluntly added, licking his lips as he peered around anxiously, "I- look. I...Suzie Forestar was one of us, she may have been Slytherin but she was just a *kid."*

"You think you can make us good duelers?" One student asked skeptically, crossing her arms as if to protect her, an unmistakably defensive body position.

"No, not that at all." Skylar shook his head, his expression more stony, "I think that we all *need* to know how to stall for time, because who knows when it's going to be your family? Your friends?"

"You think *time* is going to save us?"

"Time could have saved a lot of us," Skylar retorted, eyes sharp and flinty in the room, "It could have- just a few small seconds could make the difference. It could save you, or…"

"Your sister," Ron added quietly, looking at his feet.

The topic, the sudden real connection twisted something in the room. It sobered suddenly, the skepticism melted away to leave the rough raw undeniable *truth* of Skylar's words.

"I think we should learn the Patronus Charm," Skylar explained loudly, "It- it isn't *only* a shield against dark creatures, but it can also be sent distances as a messenger."

Fred and George Weasley nodded as one and stepped forward looking trademark giddy, "We're in!"

The spell was hard, but the realization that the world was harder motivated them to do their best.

They began working, although Skylar did announce that producing a Patronus in the middle of a brightly lit classroom when they were not under threat was *very* different to producing it when confronted by something like a dementor.

"But they're so pretty!" A girl sighed happily, trailing her hands through the swirling silver mist. Her patronus took on a bold swan-like shape, soaring around the Room of Requirements.

"They aren't supposed to be pretty, they're supposed to protect you," Skylar scolded, although it was only half hearted considering the beaming smile across his face, "We really need to grab a boggart or something."

Hermione's Patronus, a shining silver otter, was gamboling around the room.

"They *are* sort of nice, aren't they?" Hermione said rhetorically, looking at the otter.

Neville Longbottom was having the worst luck, his face was screwed up in concentration, but only feeble wisps of silver smoke drifted from the tip of his wand.

"You've got to think of something happy," Skylar gently reminded him.

"I'm trying," said Neville miserably, nearly shaking from the exertion.

The two jumped as someone new had drifted nearby, looking with a critical eye.

"Ah- h-hello." Neville mumbled, looking alarmed and incredibly uncomfortable with the close proximity to the Slytherin.

"Hey," Skylar chirped, looking at Adrian with a slightly curious look, "Neville is still having a bit of trouble."

Adrian blinked slowly and the movement made the facial scars (although they were turning silvery, they were no less disturbing) twist unsettlingly.

"Fake it," Adrian sighed, as if merely coming over was beneath him, "The memory doesn't have to be real."

Skylar floundered, "It...it doesn't?"

Adrian snorted softly through his nose, "No, it doesn't."

"I-Is yours? Real?" Neville gulped out, causing Adrian to pause and stare at the other boy as if he had asked something outrageous.

Skylar was holding his breath, as well as Fred and George Weasley, ready to intercept with twin Coyotes weaving through the legs of nearby students.

Adrian blinked slowly once again, "It's fake. I don't have any happy memories, so I made them up."

Somehow, the concept of that was horrifying.

Adrian pointed his wand in front of him, to the side of the two. He cast the spell quietly, his whole body shuttering as he very quietly gasped as if it pained him.

His patronus solidified in something large and lumbering, close to the ground with a thick hefty tail.

It was big, and it kept getting *bigger.*

Hermione gave a squeal climbing onto the crate to lift her legs off the ground where the scaled patronus rumbled lowly, its snout rather blunt but filled with many many teeth.

"Is that- is than an *alligator?"*

Zacharias Smith whooped from across the room, squinting at the reptile fascinated.

"It's...it's *big."* Neville breathed in alarm, looking highly alarmed.

"It's a black caiman." Adrian looked slightly proud, "They're the apex predator where they live."

"Sure it's not a crocodile?" Someone asked unsure, although interested by the way the eight foot reptile was waddling its streamline body around the room.

"No, it's bigger than one." Adrian shrugged, staring at the patronus.

"Aren't Caiman really aggressive?" Hermione blanched, "They've attacked people!"

Adrian grinned, showing teeth as he beckoned Skylar with his wand, "Yours, eh?"

Skylar grinned in queu, the strangely gleeful expression that always appeared when Adrian challenged him to something. Skylar nodded, bellowing the spell and sending something long with spindly legs leaping through the air, bounding above heads as it chuffed and tossed its horns proud.

It was slightly smaller than a dear, and its horns branched from its skull outwards before stabbing straight upwards with small ridges around the base.

"It's an antelope," Skylar unnecessarily added, "Empala?"

"Impala." Adrian murmured quietly, the antelope's nostrils flared, silvery fur practically glowing in the light.

The Caiman hissed, thrashing in alarm as something leapt onto its back. A rabbit- no, a hare the size of a small dog.

"Sorry about that," Luna apologized, not looking sad at all, "I'm amazed you can cast a patronus, Adrian."

Adrian scowled looking slightly annoyed, "I told you I could."

Luna shook her head in disbelief, or to make her earrings jingle, "Yes, but I didn't know if you'd still be able to."

Adrian repressed a shudder, and Skylar found himself pausing as he considered the words.

Why would Adrian *not* be able to produce a patronus anymore? Skylar had heard cases of course, where the memories used to create the patronus were too painful to remember, even in danger. His dad had told him a few examples of other aurors, unable to manage the spell after the death of a loved one.

Why would *Adrian* be stressed or struggle with the spell? The only one that had died recently was Suzie Forestar, and the rumor mill had suggested that the two had never gotten along well.

Skylar felt himself repress a twitch with how callously he thought *'that had died recently.'*

How could he think like that? How could he just...just *accept* someone dying as normality? As an event likely to be *repeated?*

"I thought you knew I'm good with most spells, Luna." Adrian bantered back, tone sharp yet his

body language suggested he was more calm in her presence.

Luna smiled dreamily, "Except for hair charms. Yours are terrible."

Adrian's lip twitched slightly as he looked away, observing the massive caiman as it opened its terrifying maw and stayed stationary.

"I think it's funny," Luna offered with a shrug, "That your patronus is a caiman. They're related to crocodiles aren't they? But they only live in South America, and they're very mean."

"Maybe *I'm* mean." Adrian shot back, causing Luna to reach out and gently bop his nose as if he was a misbehaving cat.

"I like yours, Skylar. It's very cute. They're very fast, and live in Africa I think." Luna tapped her lip consideringly, watching the Impala leap through the air above.

"Yeah, it's faster than most patronus." Skylar admitted with a small grin, "Nothing impressive to look at but I think it's accurate."

Luna nodded knowingly and turned to glance over her shoulder. Adrian sighed loudly as he spotted another student approaching his caiman with no regard for self safety. He snuck off, walking through the crowd likely to deter the student from aggravating the giant lizard.

Luna watched him walk before she paused, stiff and suddenly incredibly serious, Skylar almost stumbled at the sudden change of her personality.

"Okay," she confirmed calmly, looking back at Skylar.

'She was looking to see if someone was listening.'

"Do you want a privacy w-" Skylar started before Luna shook her head- radish earrings and hair whirling around.

"He'll notice," Luna shrugged as if noticing a *ward* was *common,* "Do you think it's strange how your patronus and Adrian's are foes?"

Skylar reeled, *what?*

"I mean, they aren't really." Luna shrugged, gazing off sightless, "Yours lives in Africa and Adrian's lives in South America. But your patronus is an antelope, and his is similar to a crocodile."

Her eyes sharpened suddenly, looking serious and *searching,* "Don't you think it's strange? How you're so similar to enemies but so far apart?"

"I-" Skylar bumbled, entirely off guard with the topic, "I- Luna, what are you talking about?"

Luna looked unsure with the questioning, and looked even more paranoid in the close quarters they were standing in, "He's sick."

Skylar's head was whirling from the sudden topic change. With how...oppressively serious Luna was acting, he knew better than to question her. He would go along with everything she said.

Skylar chewed on his bottom lip quietly, "I- I know there's something wrong but-"

"No, no he's *sick,"* Luna stressed, her entire body tense as if hanging by a single taught rope, "There's something *wrong."*

Luna had always been a rather strange one, yet she seemed to have a keen understanding of when things were unusual. She had surprised Skylar on many occasions with knowing information she shouldn't have, and through a few instances even Hermione gave her grudging respect.

Luna *knew* things, yet not in the strange supernatural way that Trelawney was always bemoaning about. Skylar had begun to suspect that she was a very very good actor, and constantly portrayed herself more daft than usual to simply listen to what others didn't hear.

Skylar also believed that she was very lonely.

"Okay," Skylar agreed quietly, "Would you like to talk later? After this?"

Luna gave the slightest inclination of a nod before she twirled away, nearly sending Neville flying.

The caiman gave a low rumble, snapping its silver jaws shut with a resonating *crack!*

Near the end of the alloted time, Neville was able to conjure the roughest shape of a patronus, thanks to the surprising help of Adrian. The patronus wasn't corporeal yet, flickering between a misty shield or the condensed flash of something silver and furry.

Ron's patronus, a Jack Russell Terrier, eagerly barked at the door, personally saying goodbye to the groups of students who slipped out into the hallways cheerily.

Adrian lingered slightly, sticking to the back wall as he watched the groups leave, even reciprocating a small wave to the twins.

'He's sick' Skylar thought to himself unsure, looking at the other student a bit closer.

Adrian Selwyn *did* appear the slightest bit more pale, although it could have been the lighting. The dark circles under his eyes were slightly alarming, yet Skylar couldn't imagine him without them.

The branching scars across his skin were impossible to count, looking sore and angry although they were starting to silver with age. His eyes were different too, ever since break he had been staring off in thought more than before. Moments where he wouldn't meet anyone's eyes, tracing bricks with fingers absentmindedly as if fretting over something unknown. He seemed in dilemma, or an ultimatum.

There was something more worrying as well- the fact that Luna had mentioned what Skylar had firmly been denying.

Remus *had* mentioned that he as well as Professor Dumbledore suspected that Adrian was intended to try and kill him, the fact that his patronus took the form of something so *similar* to Skylar's patronus' natural enemy was alarming.

Of course it could be nothing, but a patronus was supposed to reveal or match parts of the soul- the expression of your innate being.

Skylar knew that his patronus, the Impala or simply the antelope, represented him pretty well. It was small, but incredibly fast and able to leap heights so high it almost soared. Catching it when it was running was no easy feat, and the males took care of the herd and scouted for threats.

It matched him rather well, more than a deer ever would (although his dad had been a bit put out).

But a caiman...well, Skylar didn't know much about crocodiles (or whatever a caiman was), but what he *did* know was how they lurked in rivers and dragged prey into the water and drowned it.

And they had a *wicked* bite.

Skylar didn't know enough about the animals to begin with, so it probably wasn't worth thinking too much about it.

"Hey mate, we're heading out," Ron cheerfully added, clapping Skylar on the shoulder once, "You coming?"

Skylar hesitated, "I'm staying back. Luna wants to talk to me."

Ron's eyebrows rose, "Luna? Loony Lovegood?"

"Don't call her that, honestly." Hermione huffed, smacking Ron with one of her arms as she peered around to look at Skylar worriedly, "Is something the matter?"

"No, nothing like that." Skylar assured with a small smile, "Ah, just something maybe important."

Ron frowned and looked at Skylar with a small tilt of his head, "You're a terrible liar, mate."

Skylar huffed slightly, "Okay, well, I'm just worried over Adrian."

Ron blurted out in a slightly annoyed tone, "*Selwyn?"* the same time Hermione yelped, "*Adrian!"*

The two paused, glancing at each other before looking back at Skylar in worry.

"What's wrong with Adrian?" Hermione hurriedly said, words slurring together so that it took a small moment for Skylar to even realize what she said. "Is it because he ran off over break?"

That *was* a mystery that they all had to uncover, although Skylar knew Adrian wouldn't give that information up willingly.

Ron looked a bit more skeptic of the situation, "Why are you worrying about him, mate?"

Skylar withheld his first impulsive answer, and thought carefully in his head.

Both Ron and Hermione knew that Adrian Selwyn was in some sort of trouble, or at least had some sort of 'bloody weird background' in Ron's words.

Ron had been suspicious that Adrian was a more approachable Draco, and a 'death eater spy', whereas Hermione had vehemently defended Adrian's character multiple times.

Hermione *had* used Adrian's almost charming help and library encounters back in their first and second years- yet after that (and after he had been cursed to London and back) he was...different.

More reserved, quiet but undoubtedly more *mean.* Skylar hadn't told Ron and Hermione about the time he had to practically drag the other boy off of Draco, or how much blood really had been shed that day. He knew without a doubt, that Ron would jump to conclusions and Hermione would take Adrian's side and once again Skylar would have to mediate the peace.

It was out of the question to even *think* about telling them what Remus had confided in Skylar. He knew that although his two friends meant well, they didn't know enough about the situation to really form an unbiased opinion. Yet, on that same trail of thought Skylar wasn't *telling* them enough information to *not* be biased. It was a predicament, and although he would really love input and advice he didn't feel comfortable sharing Adrian's personal information.

Something about all of this...sat wrong in Skylar's stomach. It felt private, inclusive only to Skylar

and Skylar alone.

"It's likely nothing," Skylar hesitantly stated, "Luna's worried that he's sick and doesn't want to admit it."

Hermione tilted her head and pursed her lips considerably, "He was really helpful today! I didn't think Neville would ever get the patronus charm." she confessed.

"He *was* helpful." Ron grudgingly admitted, although he looked almost annoyed by the fact.

Skylar missed when he too, was that innocent.

"I'm just going to hear Luna out." Skylar smiled reassuringly, "You two head back, i'll catch up in a bit."

"Don't let Umbridge get you!" Ron retorted, already heading towards the exit doors.

As soon as they left, Luna entered the room. She likely had been waiting outside to give the three privacy; Skylar felt almost guilty at how long she had waited.

"Luna," Skylar greeted pleasantly, peering around the room for anything to sit on.

Almost instantly, two chairs popped into existence, plush and comfortable mimicking the Gryffindor common room chairs.

"Oh this is nice," Luna commented, hopping onto her velvet chair with a happy sigh, "Very homey."

"It's a miracle anyone leaves the tower," Skylar joked with a small quirk to his mouth.

She smiled, hiding the fragile expression behind a curtain of blonde hair. Skylar hadn't ever seen her so exposed, the dreamy facade washed away by concern.

Skylar's gentle smile fell, and he was once again reminded of her worried voice just an hour before. "What's this about, Luna?"

Luna plucked something from her pocket, a polished wooden talisman with string and little dried flowers. She played with it in her hands, turning it over and running her fingers over carved symbols that likely didn't actually enchant the object.

"I'm worried." Luna muttered, looking reluctant to even speak.

Skylar breathed in, and then out. She was far too stressed to even begin speaking, and Skylar found the idea of digging for details too rude or invasive.

"What sort of talisman is that?" He inquired, peering at the deep brown wood and fraying string.

"Oh," She blinked, holding it out for Skylar's closer inspection, "It's a celtic torque. They're usually made out of metal, but I thought that selkies would like the wood more."

Skylar raised the talisman for further investigation, biting his tongue when he realized that the string was actually very carefully braided strips of rubbery leather.

"I make them a lot," Luna mentioned, "I like to think that they help."

"Help with what?" Skylar inquired, gently investigating the small dried flowers, held together

likely from a stasis charm.

Luna fiddled with a lock of her hair, accepting the talisman when it was returned, "Well, some of them are to make other people happier. Some are to ward off the doxies or lysalanders. That hasn't helped, so I've tried helping the thestrals more, and making these for selkies or phoenixes or cat siths."

Skylar rolled his tongue in his mouth, thinking. He knew what selkies were- Dean Thomas had mentioned seeing a pack swimming off the coast in the ocean when he was a kid. The creatures were seal-women, and generally peaceful if left alone. Cat sith's were different, he had thought that it was just a nickname for feline animagi'. Phoenixes on the other hand, he knew *plenty well.*

"Have you met Fawkes?" Skylar asked curiously, "He's Professor Dumbledore's familiar, a big phoenix."

Luna looked hesitant, "I don't think Fawkes would like me."

"Fawkes likes *everyone,"* Skylar insisted, "He's very beautiful as well, I think you'd like him a lot."

Luna shook her head, radish earrings bouncing back and forth, "I visit the thestrals too much, I don't think Fawkes would be comfortable with me."

That was new information. "Do thestrals and phoenix's not get along?"

Luna bit her lip and fumbled with the talisman between her thumbs, "I didn't think they would. Phoenix's brighten the soul and thestrals steal them."

"What." *What?*

Luna shrunk back, "I...Phoenixes help you with their song? It... it lifts the soul and makes you lighter. Thestrals are like cat siths, they're made from souls."

Skylar's brain was barely understanding what Luna was saying, "What about selkies then?"

"They judge them," Luna's voice was quiet, as if she was confessing something she didn't want to, "Selkies can tell, I think they smell it."

Skylar didn't even know that a soul existed.

Well, no that wasn't true. He knew Dementors kissed by sucking out the soul of a person, apparently leaving them lifeless but still living. Hagrid had also mentioned that thestrals had something to do with souls also, but had insisted that they were completely docile. It would be rather silly to think that nothing else could affect a 'soul'.

"Well, why don't we go to Fawkes and we'll see what he thinks about all of this soul stuff?" Skylar offered, "I mean, you weren't *positive* he wouldn't like you, so maybe he will."

Luna looked torn, "Professor Dumbledore is gone because of Umbridge. But-"

Skylar held out his hand, "I'm sure that your soul is perfectly fine, Luna."

She stilled, looking at him as if a great tragedy had taken place, "Oh Skylar, it's not me."

Several things clicked into place at once.

Skylar swallowed and tried to think clearly- it was no use leaping to conclusions, "You're worried

about Adrian?"

Luna chewed on her tongue and nodded quietly.

"Well," Skylar thought rapidly, "I don't know if you know this, but his scar is a curse scar and sometimes-"

"It isn't that," Luna corrected quietly, "He...It was after that. The thestrals are different now, since the start of this year."

"I'm sure it's nothing Luna, he'd likely go to Madam Pomfrey if he thinks he's sick-"

Luna shook her head, almost desperate with the action, "Skylar he's *sick."*

'Okay, okay.' Skylar thought to himself quickly, *'I'll ask him.'*

"Do you think that *I* could convinc-"

"No!" She nearly shouted, "You can't tell him I told you anything!"

Skylar nearly jumped at how loud she suddenly was.

"You *can't."* Luna's lower lip trembled, "He- I don't...Skylar you *can't."*

"Okay I won't!" Skylar hushed her, eyes wide at how bizarre the entire conversation is, "Why tell me then?"

Luna's lip was trembling harder, her eyes glassy as if about to cry, "Because I don't know what to *do* anymore."

"I wasn't going to tell you," Luna confessed quietly, "I thought that I could fix this on my own, but I don't think I *can."*

"It was *stupid* of me to think that I could actually *do* anything." Luna sniffed, and with a pang of horror Skylar realized that she *was* crying.

"But there's something *wrong* with him, and..and I can't *do anything."*

Skylar exhaled shakily, "How...how do you *know* something's wrong?"

Luna wiped her eyes on her sleeve, sniffling quietly, "My mother was a spell creator. She...she'd experiment and they had a taste."

Skylar struggled to comprehend what she was saying, "A taste?"

"A feeling," Luna mumbled, correcting herself, "Like when you hear crinkling parchment and you feel tingles down your spine?"

That Skylar understood, he knew that feeling well.

"It's like that, but there's a feeling kinda, cold or warm. Sour, bitter…" Luna tucked her legs to her chest, "He was kinda warm, like when a match is too close to your fingers. But now he…" Her face twisted, looking sickened and somehow *furious,* "It's like that feeling after you sniff bubotuber pus."

Skylar ran his fingers through his hair in exhaustion. He kinda knew what Luna was talking about,

his mother had an affinity for charms and had confessed a few times that each charm almost had a sound to it. Luna having a feeling for specific people would be weird, but considering that curse residue could be picked up by anyone a bit sensitive to spells, it wasn't that strange. Skylar thought he remembered a foggy statistic, some number of witches able to have a sense with magic. It was too far back to remember the number clearly, but he thought it had been high.

And to think, all this time people thought Luna strange when really she could just feel a tiny bit of spellwork. No wonder she had caught onto the patronus charm so fast.

"Okay, is anyone else like that?" Skylar asked, thinking through the entire exchange, "Or has the err...the pus been recent?"

"Nobody else, and since the start of this year." Luna shrugged, pausing and looking incredibly reluctant.

"...his head is cold." She confessed, closing her eyes in defeat, "It hurts, Skylar."

Oh.

'We're thinking Adrian may be cursed as a weapon to be used against you. He may try to kill you due to Bellatrix.'

Skylar stood suddenly, feeling nauseous. "How long?"

It was almost as if Luna understood how grave the information was as she nearly whispered, "Always."

Since before he was cursed then.

Skylar was beginning to think, that Remus had been right.

Skylar had always referred to his fellow classmates as something innocent, something naive despite their best wishes to know more. They haven't experienced the world, yet in retrospect Skylar hadn't either. The difference, was that Skylar had grown up far too soon under the weight of loveless support. He had received fanmail, intermingled with death threats and manic words of devotion, bordering on unsettling devotion. Since he was a toddler, witches and wizards would whisper about him in corridors, in the streets. More than once he'd seen a shapeless figure leave him tokens of love, of respect laced with poisons and honey. Skylar had seen death- although now he guessed he could say that he had *seen* death. He had loved people, he had lost people. He was a hypocrite, but he was aware of it. He didn't consider himself a child, and the welfare of another student (no matter how much it pained him) was not a concern for someone who had the literal *weight of the Wizarding World on his shoulders.*

Yet something about Luna struck him deeply, like a thorn he could never quite dig out from the meat of his palm. Her words were gentle, they oozed like fresh blood or perhaps the desperate pleas of forgiveness from someone who committed manslaughter. Luna was a child, matured in areas that hurt Skylar to think about but she was *still a child.*

It wasn't *time* for her to speak in metaphors, or only half truths. Skylar was tired of games, he was tired of this immense pressure that weighed on him so heavily it was difficult to rise in the mornings. Luna knew something, but she was a child.

(Skylar was a child too.)

"Luna," Skylar's voice dropped, barely a tone deeper but perhaps the inflection behind it was what

really struck the girl. "I'm asking you this as a friend, but I need you to know that I *can't* do anything, unless you tell me *everything."*

Luna chewed on her bottom lip. "You'll help him?"

Skylar settled himself and gave the smallest of a nod towards her, "if It's within my abilities. But you need to know, that if I *can't* help him, I can't just let him suffer alone. If this is beyond me, I *need* to get him proper help."

Luna's eyes widened in alarm, a small gasp leaving her mouth. "No-*no,* Skylar you *can't."*

"What do you expect me to do?" Skylar snapped back, feeling instantly guilty for treating her so sharply. "I'm sorry, I don't mean it like that. It's just...what *can* I do that someone else can't? I can't help him with medical attention, or laws or other problems he may have, Luna. I'm just a kid still, I really can't do much unless you let me."

Luna was shaking ever so slightly, and Skylar realized just how much pressure the other girl must be under. "I- I need you to listen-"

"Luna," Skylar soothed her with a resigned smile, "I'm not a trained mediwizard. I can listen, but if there's a problem I really can't do anything else. I don't know *how,* I'm not certified and...and it's not really fair to me."

Luna looked shaken, alarmed in a sharp aware way. "You're not going to help him? I'm his friend."

"Being his friend doesn't equate to taking on his problems," Skylar soothed back. Luna was just a *child.* "To be a good friend, you don't need to take on his burdens alone. That's not your job."

Luna's eyes welled with tears, and Skylar felt so immensely saddened.

They were all so young, this war truly was something unspeakable.

"Luna, is it wrong to do terrible things for someone you care about?"

"You're scaring me, Adrian."

'I can appar- I can do magic. I have...I've done magic that's advanced. Very advanced. I'm strong, I- I know I'm strong. I can- Moody said this was going to make me useful. I'm useful. I'm so so useful.'

Since the removal of Dumbledore as Headmaster, and the decree banning all teachers and students to converse, Skylar had barely an opportunity to talk to anyone about what Luna had confided.

The floo network was being monitored, and all owls were being searched. He *knew* that any attempt to contact Dumbledore would result in disaster.

He could see why Luna was so stressed over the information, and now that Skylar knew it was all that he could think about.

Even if he could get a letter out to *Remus,* but with Umbridge watching the halls so carefully, it would be nearly impossible. At this point, Skylar would have settled with talking to a legal or parental representative, but requesting one would only draw more attention and make things *worse.* Skylar didn't think that Umbridge would allow him to call in his parents under

student rights, he was sure she'd find a way to ban that also.

"It's getting to me," Skylar confessed with a scowl and a half hearted kick at the ground. "There's nowhere in this castle that's away from her!"

Hermione rolled her eyes but didnt lift her head from the book she was reading, "What do you expect? With so many accidents at the castle, it would look terrible on her record."

"Yeah mate, plus I think she has it out for everyone." Ron added, poking and shifting a stack of parchment into a very precarious tower.

It wouldn't be much longer until something gave way- everyone was already feeling the tension. The Twins looked just about ready to snap, although all chaos would surely break loose. If the Gryffindor tower didn't explode in fireworks, the whole castle was sure the dungeons would start burning.

"I wish I could get a letter to Dumbledore." Skylar confessed quietly, finding relief in at least spreading part of his knowledge.

"Hah, not likely." Ron snorted, "With that Umbitch so paranoid, she'd pounce on your owl at first sight."

"With how paranoid the ministry is also, we'd all get in trouble." Hermione added, looking out of the window with a large sigh, "I wish that this year would *end* already."

"It's like the whole castle is waiting for something." Ron shrugged, scowling as the movement sent the parchment tower to the floor, "Hey! You should ask Selwyn to set her on fire."

"Ron!" Hermione gasped, smacking him with the book she had been reading. Ron yelped, ducking away although.

Skylar's brows crinkled in worry at the thought. With Luna's worries and Adrian's impressive past record, well…

He wouldn't be surprised if something *did* happen.

His friends didn't quite understand just how bad something like that would be. Skylar had heard Remus talking to his father before, stressed to his hairline with how to juggle Adrian's record. Property damage, student assault, illegal selling of goods, illegal selling of *illicit* goods, well, anything else and Adrian would surely be expelled. It drove Skylar barmy that Hermione and Ron didn't realize the significance of a single outburst- how they accepted it as something *inevitable.*

Once again, Skylar wanted to scream.

"We should push up the next meeting," Skylar interrupted Hermione's vigorous textbook reading, "I think we should work again on aiming practice."

"Aim?" Ron protested in a whine. "What? Why!"

Hermione looked puzzled as well, "Why, Skylar? We all have decent aim for most spells."

'But you haven't seen Adrian spell birds', Skylar bit his tongue, chewing it consideringly. *'If that's what he can do, what do you think adults can do?'*

"I just think that it may relieve some stress in us," He explained hesitantly.

Hermione's eyes brightened, "Oh! Wonderful idea!"

Skylar only hoped that maybe some excitement would delay the breaking point a little more.

"I hate her." Adrian spat, taking relish in kicking a stray rock and sending it clattering down the pipe. It echoed, ringing wetly as it echoed for a fair distance.

"She is foul," Lutain agreed, coiled gently as they advanced towards Adalonda's chamber.

There had been an increase in corridor monitors and alarms all throughout the hallways; Adrian was only able to sneak through the plumbing thanks to his Animagus form. Never had he appreciated it more than when Umbridge began tailing him, watching his every movement. Adrian was almost positive a new rule had been enacted, and she was waiting for him to unknowingly break it. He tucked into a loo, making way *instantly* for the pipes to slip away out of sight. He knew that she would be more furious, suspecting some sort of foul play now with his inexplicable vanishing.

"I swear she has it out for me!" Adrian continued, his voice raising in pitch, "She's been following me for *days!"*

Lutain made a noise, ignoring him in favour of sliding down and darting through the dark room.

There was a low groan and a sound of shifting scales on stone. Adalonda emerged, foggy yellow eyes iridescent in the gloom.

"Cerestes," she greeted, more out of nobility than care, *"You've been gone a while."*

"Longer than I'd like." Adrian admitted, sighing and plopping onto the ground in exhaustion, *"It feels like forever."*

"You do not have the understanding of eras ending." She chided him in a smooth rolling rumble.

Adalonda emerged further, her long tongue piercing the air as she scented it many times, glancing towards Lutain suddenly.

Adrian looked between the two, puzzled, *"What?"*

Adalonda looked strange, her eyes filled with an emotion Adrian couldn't place, *"I am curious when Lutain will stay in my chambers with me, instead of your ventures."*

Adrian blinked in surprise, *"Why would he?"*

Adalonda paused, *"Forgive me, I had assumed you had...discussed the age."*

"Oh what?" Adrian spoke, blurting it in English in his growing dread.

Lutain tasted the air carefully, *"My age of resting?"*

"Death," Adalonda supplied helpfully, tilting her head to the side to see him better, *"Had you thought he'd live forever?"*

Adalonda was painfully blunt at times.

"What?" Adrian nearly shrieked, panic rising quickly in his throat, *"Lutain what are you talking about?"*

"I am old, I have lived many suns and seasons." Lutain hesitantly added.

"You're only- only maybe twelve!"

"His kind live for only one of your decades," Adalonda sighed, sounding condescending the way a parent would over something basic.

Lutain wasn't a magical species.

No.

No.

Nononononono

"You can't die." Adrian blurted, voice hitching and warbling uncontrollably, *"You can't die!"*

Lutain's tail flickered, *"Master, I am old. I have lived well and-"*

"Nagini is like, thirty years old!" Adrian screamed, voice deafening as it echoed, "You *can't die!"*

Adalonda's tail lifted slowly, then *slammed* against the stone like a battering ram. The ground itself vibrated, water trembling from the shockwave. Adrian jumped in alarm, staggering on his feet. His breaths were fluttering too quickly in his chest.

"Leave us, little one?" Adalonda asked Lutain gently. The smaller black serpent paused, as if considering. After a brief pause he honored her request and left through one of the dozens of pipes.

Adalonda swung her head back, and once again Adrian was amazed at her size. Scales thick and strong, flexing and glossy in the dull lighting. Adrian often forgot how large and how old she was, but on few occasions her regality bewildered him beyond words.

"Nagini has lasted, as she lives beyond the realm of normal life." Adalonda hissed, flickering her tongue as fast as a hummingbird's wings, *"She has been enchanted with magics far beyond you."*

"That's shite!" Adrian protested, throat clogging sourly, *"She- my father got her when he was in Hogwarts! It can't be that much ahead of me!"*

Adalonda's eyes were impossible to read- golden and clouded from the third membrane she used to protect Adrian.

"It's beyond you," She repeated after a brief pause, *"You are a mere speck of your father's skill."*

Adrian flinched, the near obsessive mantra *'I'm useful I'm useful'* drowned out his thoughts in a thrumming haze. He didn't need to think like that anymore. That wasn't him, it didn't matter.

Still, it ached at him painfully. A hot throbbing like a tooth torn out by the root.

His head hurt, his ears popping with the pressure of his own fluttering breaths.

"Please," Adrian's voice was hoarse, raspy from where his throat had clenched around his words. *"Adalonda, Adalonda help him."*

"I want to," she soothed, looking genuinely sad, but resigned to Lutain's fate. *"I am fond of the little one. He is intelligent."*

"Then help him!" Adrian snapped, feeling his body shake minutely as he stood there, panic making his skin feel frosty.

Adalonda had to know what to do, she was something with immeasurable knowledge and information. She had seen things, lived through eras where commonplace information was what was now considered lost. She was far too calm, resigned and disinterest despite her obvious sadness. She had seen this before, she likely had seen many friends come and go in her age.

Not Nagini, which meant that she knew a way (or suspected) some sort of way to sustain him.

Lutain was *his friend.*

Adrian's lungs burned for air, *"Adalonda please I'll do anything."*

Adalonda pulled her head back, resting her body in thick coils before she looked down at Adrian in the visage of a cobra, *"You would not accept the requirements, to sustain and prevent the death of Lutain."*

She sounded so certain, as if it was a natural truth.

Adrian shook his head wildly, hair mussing as he hoarsely pleaded *"I would! I would do that Adalonda,"* Adrian's voice cracked, his hissing trailing off in a whine. *"Lutain is everything to me!"*

Adalonda's eyes almost glowed, *"I do not think you are capable of the magics."*

"I am!" Adrian screamed, trembling as finally something snapped and spilled, an animalistic gasping that shook his frame, *"Adalonda tell me!"*

Her tongue flicked the air, smelling.

Testing his worth, his ability.

(*I know I'm useful. Maybe I wasn't before, but I am now.)*

"A ritual, or a ritual to make a spell." She explained slowly in a crooning voice, like a siren playing with its food, *"Simple to cast, and to prepare."*

I can do this

Adrian nodded his head repeatedly, chest and mind steadying roughly. A soreness spread through his muscles, an exhaustion too pure to describe. *"What do I need? I- I can go buy it, or I can try."*

Adalonda exhaled through her nostrils, the wet breath jostled Adrian's hair. It puffed against his skin, juxtaposing the coolness of the chamber.

"I have all that is needed," Adalonda assured smoothly, voice a gentle rumble that was more grudging admittance. It didn't mean she was withholding information anymore, which was an improvement.

Maybe she had finally clued in that Adrian wasn't a child to be *coddled.*

"What is needed is only one trail."

Only one pathway, only one series of directions to guarantee Lutain's life.

Adrian sniffed and rubbed his eyes and face with the back of his arm. He

was *frustrated,* embarrassed by the stubborn tears that had leaked out slowly and continued to do so. He felt hot, warm all over and flushed with emotion. *"If you have everything still, is this what my Father did? For Nagini? The same one?"*

Adalonda paused before responding after a few terse seconds, *"No. He did do this spell not for Nagini. A different method for her."*

"I can do it anyways." Adrian hissed out, his throat burning like he was choking on venom. *"What did he do it for? What did he do to Nagini?"*

Adalonda watched him carefully, her tail moving slightly. Did she see the difference? Did she see now how he was motivated for *himself?*

"Nagini was different," Adalonda rumbled, almost wistful as she stared over Adrian's shoulder. *"Temporary, to prolong her. Eventually, same was done to her as what will be done to Lutain."*

Adrian nodded, swallowing twice to try and compose himself. *"When?"*

"It will take time."

"I-It'll be hard to sneak out under Umbridge but I could do it during the night sometime…"

"It will span a day." Adalonda informed him with no sympathy, *"You will be in pain."*

He could do it for Lutain. Not even for himself, he could do it for his friend.

"I don't care." Adrian breathed, *"What- what's the spell called? Do I know it?"*

The longest pause yet, as if Adalonda was struggling to recall the name, her maw opened twice, moving with cartilage flexibility.

"I know not names for your magics," Adalonda confessed, dismissing as if it was nothing important, *"I remember the steps."*

Adrian didn't think of it. Lutain generally used his own nicknames for others, not abiding the human system of naming objects and people. Adalonda was a blessing with her fluidity in human terms and references, although a few things still miffed her.

She didn't need to know the name of the spell, only how to do it.

"Okay, I can do it during Easter. The week long holiday, I'll stay at the castle." Adrian licked his lips, feeling dry. *"Or... or right before classes start again."*

Adalonda thrummed a low noise in her throat, a pleased noise. *"I have doubt, Cerestes."*

"I told you!" Adrian screamed, throat raw and hands trembling. "I can *do it!"*

Something scurried away, likely Wormtail. He had thought she'd be startled by his confidence, that she would scold his confidence and remind him of his weaknesses again. The cruel animal laws, the weak always die.

Instead, Adalonda watched him with something wicked in her eyes. *"I'll take your word."*

Since he learned his friend's fate, Adrian didn't let Lutain out of his sight.

Lutain wasn't happy with the exchange, claiming it was a 'useless human thing', but didn't act out even when smooshed in Adrian's bag between quills.

Adrian was very tempted to message his father, yet with the heavy surveillance on him he would only be able to inquire through the tattooed snake on his skin.

Despite the flutter of anxiety, the idea of asking his father for help *again* was…

Adrian didn't need help. He could do *anything* his father could. He wasn't weak, he was *useful* and Adalonda would help him *prove it.*

He could do it, he could make his father proud. Most of all, he could prove to himself that he didn't need to live under his father's praise, that he didn't need some sort of *external assurance.*

(He still burned for it.)

"You're being watched," Lutain informed him quietly, peeking his head out from where he had hid in Adrian's bag. When *wasn't* he being watched?

Adrian paused and looked casually to the side. He stilled his motions, careful not to hurt the agitated vine any further.

Herbology took place in the greenhouses, and in the February air, water had condensed slightly on the windows. He had thought it would be Filch, or one of the cocky Slytherin students gifted with pompous asinine excuses for real power.

It was difficult to see through the fogged glass, but not so much he couldn't see the large black creature, standing a half dozen feet beyond the edge of the forest.

The thestral, likely Mylla, was watching him.

"I'll tell you when it leaves," Lutain offered, Adrian nodding silently before he attacked the vine once more.

Mylla never left.

Astoria Greengrass was alarmed when one morning, a Hogwarts barn owl swooped over the table with the daily post, and delivered her a scroll.

The scroll could barely be called a scroll, in reality it was more a scrap of paper that was hastily tied in place with a white hair tie.

She hadn't expected a letter, or any note in all honesty. It was almost arrogant, the audacity to send a letter when owls heading in and out were so heavily monitored.

Then again...that meant the note must be simple, something of no concern. Maybe it wasn't arrogant, maybe it was smart.

Without a care and to not draw attention to herself, she plucked the note free and sent the borrowed owl on its way.

She unraveled the note, peering at the handwritten *'Astoria! Can I borrow the notes from astromony? Thank you!'*

The gal, the author hadn't even spelled *astronomy* right.

It wasn't marked with a name, although the handwriting was very loopy and curly, decidedly feminine.

Astoria made a small noise of dismissal, sliding the scrap into her pocket. The message was innocent enough; except she wasn't taking Astronomy.

Astoria finished her breakfast, gathered her bag and calmly left the Great Hall and headed towards the astronomy tower.

She wasn't worried, as the note seemed polite enough. She couldn't imagine any of her yearmates trying to trick her, they had reached a new level of gullible since the High Inquisitor squad was given roam of the castle. Her sister had been working her way in with the Headmistress also, praising her with practiced elegance to charm the new head of Hogwarts. Astoria was rather safe with being randomly investigated, she hadn't given anyone a reason to suspect otherwise.

The tower was quite lovely in the morning, the sunlight filtered through the windows making the spiral staircase rather beautiful. A few of the portraits waved at her, and she smiled at them in return.

"Do you like the view also?" someone asked, startling Astoria out of her observations.

A half flight of stairs upwards, a girl was looking at her rather curiously. The newcomer had blonde hair that gave Astoria's own a run for its galleons. There was something unsettling in the girl's expression, a peculiar aura that nearly shouted *different.*

Like most different things, like deformities or strange social customs, Astoria felt the primitive desire to walk away. She ignored it of course, it wouldn't do to simply abandon her mission due to something with an air of…dottiness.

"Oh, I've never seen it in the morning." Astoria cheerfully responded, casually locking eyes and sinking forward. Vertigo struck her in her descent, viciously disorienting her.

A flash of white... snow falling from the other side of the astronomy tower windows. Snow falling just out of touch... reaching out from the covered bridge to catch flakes in unraveling wool mittens. They were faded, fringing in tufts where they had caught on tree branches and bark.

'Reach much further and you'll fall,' Someone spoke, distorted as if hearing it from water.

Astoria laughed, her voice very much not her own. She found the idea of falling so very silly, *'That would be a long ways. It would get boring, wouldn't it?'*

'Only you would call falling off a tower 'boring'. Will a griffin appear out of nowhere and catch you? I wouldn't be surprised at this point.'

She giggled, hiding a breathless grin behind one orange mitten, *'Don't be silly. You'd catch me.'*

Searing green eyes, rapidly darting back and forth as if looking for a hidden meaning that didn't exist. Paranoid, worried, hiding or *scared.* How strange, and how sad to be always prepared for someone to bite you. Waiting for a crack of a whip, or a blow that would never come.

'I guess I would.' Adrian Selwyn responded slowly, as if unsure himself.

Astoria breathed out, and felt herself snapping back into shape like an elastic. She balanced the vertigo, righting herself back to the moment. She was smiling pleasantly once more at the strange girl.

The strange girl had dangerous friends.

The girl blinked twice, tilting her head almost as if she had *noticed.* "Hello, I'm Luna."

"Astoria Greengrass." Astoria politely introduced, "I think you're in one of my classes, Ravenclaw?"

Luna nodded happily, "I am, I also sent you that owl and wondered if we could talk."

Astoria smiled, although it wasn't as honest as it was before. *What does she want?* "Of course, I don't have classes until noon."

Luna turned and skipped up the steps, heading higher and spiraling towards the top of the tower.

Once there, she opened the heavy iron door, holding it open for Astoria to clamber through. The girl had manners, how quaint.

The classroom was empty, save the many desks and thick velvet curtains that were open to reveal a beautiful view of the surrounding mountains. It was serene and quiet, as well as very isolated.

"I come here sometimes to work on essays, it's nicer in winter." Luna offered casually.

"I thought the doors were locked when Professor Sinistra isn't here."

"They are," Luna agreed, and didn't clarify any further.

The door creaked closed, and the two were completely alone.

"I'm terribly sorry to tear you away or to message you so suspiciously," Luna stated, not sounding apologetic in the slightest.

"It's fine," Astoria smiled, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

Luna bobbed her head, "I wondered if you know anything about my friend? I think your sister knows him awfully well."

"Who?" Astoria retorted, eyebrows lifting at the strange question. Inside, a ball of yarn began unfurling, taunting her in *I told you so! I told you so!*

Sirens were ringing, her palms were sweating.

"Adrian Selwyn," Luna beamed. Unknowingly, the name rained down like a shovel, uprooting mud of what would be a grave. Astoria's blood chilled.

She took one step backwards, suddenly hyper aware how alone they were, and how *high* they were.

No, Selwyn *couldn't* know. She hadn't told anyone besides Daphne her suspicions- and Daphne knew better than to blab to anyone. Daphne *knew* how unstable things had become.

Luna tilted her head, brows scrunching, "Oh, I guess that did come across a little scary."

The air shimmered, and suddenly someone *else* was there.

Astoria almost screamed, scrambling for her wand.

"Whoa whoa!" The other person yelped, voice softer and more boyish than she thought, and

recognizable. "We just want to talk!"

Astoria's cheek twitched, "What could *Skylar Potter* possibly want with me!" She hissed, mindful to keep her voice low.

"To talk," Skylar hushed, licking his lower lip in a nervous habit as he kept both hands up and in plain sight; the invisibility cloak fluttered to the ground.

Astoria's nostrils flared as she pointed her wand between the two quickly, "If this is about Suzie then-"

"What...Suzie Forestar?" Skylar asked, looking perplexed although Luna's face didn't change, "What about her?"

Astoria's jaw twitched, choking back words. Slowly, Skylar's face looked more hesitant, shifting into something older. No, not older, something more mature.

Oh, she had underestimated Skylar Potter. She had always thought he was a poster boy, an icon without any weight behind him. He wasn't, he looked like he had...Astoria didn't know. She repressed the urge to dig past his eyes, and instead looked at the window behind them

"Are you...Does Adrian know something about Suzie Forestar's death? I mean, I know that you two were in the same house but…"

What? Why inquire *now* about Selwyn if not-.

"You don't know." Astoria whispered in disbelief. She adjusted her gaze, staring at the *tremendously stupid girl.* "You're his friend and you don't *know?"*

Luna's face was alarmingly calm, like she was *prepared.* "We were wondering if you noticed Adrian acting a bit strange?"

Skylar slowly lowered his arms, but kept them in her view. "We're worried about him."

Astoria almost laughed, "You- you're *worried?"* she sounded only slightly stressed, "about *him?"*

Luna frowned, "He's my friend."

Merlin, they were going to get *her killed.*

Astoria swallowed dryly, feeling that their inexperience and meddling was a much greater threat at hand. "I...I'm sorry, I need to be going. You didn't tell him about this, right?" She paused and looked at the two with something akin to panic, "*Right?*"

"No, he doesn't know." Luna's voice sounded clipped.

Astoria gave a nod of relief, feeling as if an immense weight lifted off her shoulders. That didn't mean she was quite in the clear yet, she'd have to talk to Daphne. Perhaps find a way to suggest that the Lovegood girl should be monitored, or removed from the school. Once she was out of the way, it would be simple to spread slander about Skylar Potter, especially with how much already existed.

"Astoria," Skylar quietly spoke, and something about his resigned yet gentle voice caused her to stop, "Do you think he's going to hurt you?"

Astoria shouldn't respond.

"Please," Skylar quietly added, his voice dropping even quieter, "I know it's a lot to ask, but I'd never want to hurt anyone. I'm so sorry if you think this somehow puts you in danger-"

The snake.

Astoria spun, pulling her wand and sharply snapping out detection spells. Skylar flinched back, but didn't make for his wand. Luna flicked hers into a rudimentary shielding charm, preparing for impact.

"The snake," Astoria bit out sharply, "The *bloody snake,* did you see it?"

"I- no." Skylar adapted quickly, "I checked the room when I got here and nobody came before you."

"He's been keeping Lutain on him," Luna supplied simply, "it isn't here."

Astoria relaxed once more, sliding her wand back into her pocket.

"Why is the snake so important?" Skylar asked slowly, looking between the two.

Luna looked at the floor, and refused to look up.

She wasn't going to lead the discussion, and Skylar knew too little.

"Oh," Astoria breathed, understanding the situation so aptly, "So *I'm* the chess player."

She wasn't used to this, she...her sister was supposed to be the one in charge of negotiations. *She* was the one to talk and smooth the ruffled edges of diplomacy, Astoria was supposed to be unobtainable. Knowing, a threat, always out of reach.

The astronomy tower was a strange spot for all of this, and somehow aptly fitting.

"Selwyn is adopted, but that's old news." Astoria felt numb, explaining as simply as she could, "I've been trying to figure out where he's from."

Skylar blinked in confusion from the sudden twist of events. "Well, his name's Riddle-"

Astoria's breathing paused, storing the information in her brain as quick as possible, "*Pardon?"*

Skylar Potter looked alarmed, and surprised as if he didn't know the information was useful, "ah, yes. It- I found out years back on a ma-... I found out his name is Riddle."

Astoria thought quickly, "Why would someone blood adopted to *Riddle,* live with such an infamous dark witch as Bellatrix Lestrange?"

Skylar looked reluctant before he gave a simple shrug.

They were withholding information, fine.

(It wasn't like she couldn't find out later.)

Astoria's cheek twitched again. "Fine. Adrian Riddle or whoever, *knew* Suzie Forestar, before Hogwarts. I don't think she recognized him, but he certainly remembered her."

Skylar looked deep in thought before he shook his head slowly. "No, that doesn't line up. They were in completely different worlds, and how would Suzie *not* know him?"

Astoria prepared her words like venom in her teeth, "they went to the same orphanage."

Luna looked decidedly alarmed, Skylar looked as if he couldn't comprehend the information.

"But…" Skylar spluttered in denial, "But...she would *recognize-"*

"Blood adoption." Luna interrupted quietly, with the weight of something damaging. "It...dominates the appearance and alters your genealogy."

"So this *Riddle* adopts Adrian through blood adoption, and then *gives him* to Bellatrix Lestrange." Astoria deadpans, feeling now that if they were to know everything, then she would hold them at as much risk as she was.

"That's not it." Skylar objected in a flat tone. He had seen the flaw, and he did. He was better than she thought he was, or maybe he truly realized what was at stake.

"Adrian Selwyn wouldn't tell you that," Skylar continued, voice calculated and very suspicious. He didn't deny the information, which meant now he was simply suspicious of her.

Astoria felt like sarcastically complimenting the Golden Boy.

"You're right," Astoria agreed thinly, "I owled Suzie Forestar, asking her if she remembered what Adrian Selwyn looked like or his name when they were in the same establishment."

"When?" Skylar asked sharply.

Luna shook her head, rattling her earrings against her jaw. The sound interrupted them, the ferociousness in which she argued against what Astoria was saying. "The blood adoption would-"

Astoria crossed her arms and cocked one hip. "The snake."

Skylar's breathing hitched before he exhaled in one long rush, "The- he had *his familiar."*

Luna froze, as if so overwhelmed she couldn't move.

"I sent an owl to Suzie Forestar asking if she remembered Adrian, or remembered that blasted snake. You know what happened?" Astoria's eyes flashed and her jaw trembled, "She died *the next day."*

"No." Luna breathed quietly, eyes widening as if something had dawned on her.

Skylar ran a hand over his face, rubbing his eyes exhaustedly, "Death Eaters turn up and...and *kill* Suzie right after you owl her, asking about Adrian."

Astoria nodded sharply, "Which means someone doesn't want word getting out."

Skylar looked exhausted, and Luna looked near the point of tears.

"Okay," Skylar breathed, biting his fist in thought, "So, we're *assuming* that *somehow* Suzie Forestar was under watch. If we make a *big stretch*, we could say it was *Bellatrix Lestrange* watching Suzie Forestar to make sure Adrian Selwyn's cover wasn't blown. That *also* means, that somebody doesn't want Adrian Selwyn's real name getting out."

Astoria hadn't given the boy enough credit.

He *was* taking this seriously.

"Bellatrix Lestrange doesn't work like that," Skylar continued, pulling on his fingers as if to count the problems with his theory. "Not to mention she would have just... gotten rid of Suzie instead of *waiting* until something came up."

"There's a problem." Luna whispered quietly, fiddling with her hair and refusing to look upwards, "That...that implies that she'd be protecting him still."

Astoria caught on quickly, and felt as if she had been struck by a blasting hex.

"Oh Merlin," She bemoaned quietly, shuffling towards a student desk to sit down.

"What?" Skylar asked, looking at her with alarm.

"Use your head, Potter!" Astoria's voice was high pitch from stress, "Bellatrix would be *protecting him*."

"His scar was intentional." Luna elaborated, her hands shaking, "It would mean that his appearance was planned."

If that was planned, what else had been falsified? What *else* was going on?

"Okay- *no."* Skylar barked, looking harsh and firm as he crossed his arms, "Let's *not* think that. What if it wasn't *Bellatrix,* but this...this Riddle fellow. This Riddle goes and...and meets Suzie-"

"Doesn't change the fact *someone* doesn't want this being known." Astoria breathed, closing her eyes in stress, "Merlin, Selwyn's going to know about this. He's going to *find us."*

Skylar's nostrils flared before he dug in his bag, pulling out parchment and a single quill. He stomped over to the nearest desk, taking a seat next to Astoria before he looked at the two girls, "This is what we're going to do. We are *not* going to leap to conclusions. We're going to write down *what we know*, and then make a plan from there."

Luna sat on the ground, folding her legs under her as she quietly nodded, looking at Astoria.

Astoria ran one hand through her hair and grabbed her wand to cast the strongest privacy charm she knew. At this point, with such consequences in place and the realization that someone was *watching Selwyn,* the only way to guarantee her safety would be removing Selwyn himself.

She wasn't safe, she had never been. Perhaps...perhaps if she helped, one day she *would* be.

"Alright," Astoria soberly agreed, "But he isn't going to be happy."

"First, Adrian Selwyn is adopted." Skylar spoke, looking at the two girls for objections. He wrote it carefully, then next to it wrote the mysterious 'Riddle'.

"He went to Suzie's orphanage, but I don't know the name." Astoria sighed, watching critically as it was added.

"He has a familiar, apparently even before he was adopted." Skylar added quietly.

"That young?" Astoria looked surprised, tapping her lip considering, "Birth family must have been abusive."

"Lutain knows English," Luna added without looking at the growing list, "Most don't."

"Selwyn has a tattoo." Astoria shrugged, "I haven't seen it, although my sister has. Some python."

"No he doesn't." Skylar stared at her in confusion, "We...St. Mungos did a check after Bellatrix cursed him-"

"*Supposedly* cursed him." Astoria interrupted sourly, "And it's hidden or comes when called or something."

"A hidden tattoo." Luna hunched in on herself, "He has a scar."

"No shite." Astoria snapped, feeling much more high strung with the entire situation, "The supposed one from Lestrange!"

"A different one," Luna corrected, "Thestrals like him, I think he can hear one."

Astoria and Skylar paused to look at Luna with matching expressions of impatience, "Luna, you can't *hear-"*

"Yes you can," Luna protested although her heart wasn't in it, if anything she looked like she wanted to hide in the deepest corner she could find, "Those related to them."

"How are you related to a magical omen of death?"

Luna looked at her hand, fiddling with her fingers, "Children who die in terrible ways are born as thestrals."

Astoria obviously didn't accept that fact, but Skylar wrote it down anyways.

There had to be *more.* What about Riddle?

"His boggart," Astoria perked suddenly, "His second year there was a boggart, it took shape of...some man. Likely this Riddle fellow."

Skylar scribbled it down, "You sure? Not just some random man?"

"My sister saw him pick up Adrian on the station the end of your third year." Astoria dismissed, "Same man."

Luna fiddled with her fingers again, "His patronus is a caiman. I don't know what his animagus form is."

Astoria jolted in surprise, "*Animagus?"*

Skylar inhaled slowly, and released it. Wordlessly, he wrote it down.

"He's sounding more and more like a prodigy, throw wandless fire spells on there."

Skylar did so.

"One time he stabbed Mun- er...a friend in the hand with a butter knife." Skylar smiled wryly, adding it on purely because he could.

Adrian had stayed at the Order for a long while. Skylar could see the Adrian of then, and he Adrian of *now* as two entirely different people.

Back then Adrian was a brat, but still a sometimes funny bloke. He had joined in on conversation,

and was rather helpful around the place.

Now...now Adrian seemed closed off, lost in his head but in an entirely different way than before. Perhaps it *was* the same sort, but had escalated so far beyond what they knew.

"At the O- over the summer." Skylar lamely deflected, taking note that the two people with him weren't Order members, "He...he said he had something called Oclu- Ocluman-"

"Occlumency." Astoria corrected with a blank expression, "Wonderful."

"He...Actually, maybe you know." Skylar blinked, remembering the single boggart that he, Adrian, and Sirius banished. He looked at Luna, and with the most cheerful tone of voice he could muster, asked "Have you ever heard of a boggart being afraid of something?"

Luna's face was chillingly blank, "No."

Astoria wrapped her fingers on the desk quickly, "I...I *think,* that Adrian mentioned having a brother. Accidentally, in his first year."

"Adopted or birth?" Skylar asked, causing Astoria to roll her eyes and sourly respond "You think I know?"

"He set Millicent on fire, then the train compartment. A lot of books," Astoria added, using her fingers to keep count, "Sent Malfoy and Millicent to the Hospital Wing more times than I can count."

Skylar almost smiled, but it was hollow and meaningless.

The parchment in front of them was filling up fast, and with some damning evidence.

Something didn't line up right. A single linking segment was *missing.*

Adrian had his fair share of snapping moments, but just before break when he 'vanished mysteriously' he had collapsed rather... spectacularly.

Skylar could almost *feel* the heat, rising to such a degree it felt like his blood was boiling. He remembered the cushions aflame, the grass cracking as Adrian curled in on himself and just...*shook.*

""I left her there to die. I left her, and she died. She was begging me and I left her there to starve!"

Something about the broken hysterical crying that Adrian had *shrieked* was something Skylar would never forget.

Who...who was Adrian referencing? Was it...had he somehow killed his *mother?*

Skylar would sell his left kidney to just have *ten minutes* with Professor Dumbledore...

"We're missing something," Skylar spoke, his voice slightly hoarse, "He...he'd have to see someone die, to see the thestrals. So…"

Astoria shifted, looking slightly guilty, "I...It wasn't ever confirmed by Suzie, it's why I sent her a letter. She...I think that her brother died."

Her brother.

Brother.

That….Adrian had somehow indirectly killed a *girl.* Who was this boy? Someone *else?* Or had it been a boy all along? Skylar was so *sure* Adrian had screamed about a girl- had he remembered it wrong?

"His patronus memory is false." Luna contributed, "He knows Legilimency I think."

Astoria gaped, "Impossible. He can't know both Occlumency *and* an Animagus transformation and casually fit in learning Legilimency just in time for tea!"

"I have to agree," Luna admitted with a small frown, "I don't know how he does it. It shouldn't be possible, It takes *years."*

"He can apparate." Skylar blurted.

Astoria very politely cursed foul enough that Skylar blushed.

"Is there anything else that we're missing?" Skylar asked, the opposite of calm, "Because this parchment right now makes Adrian Selwyn look scarier than that Vipertooth."

'Other than the fact he may have been raised to kill me,' Skylar thought sarcastically, biting his tongue so he wouldn't mention it.

"You mean the fact that Adrian Selwyn is some...some sort of *psychotic child prodegy?"* Astoria hissed out, lashing out with her discomfort. Skylar didn't take it to heart.

Luna looked sick, her skin pale. If it weren't for the small tremors in her hands, Skylar would have mistaken her for relaxed.

'Adrian is a Parselmouth and told that snake of his to murder Suzie's brother.' Astoria thought to herself.

'Adrian is growing sicker and I'm afraid he may do something horrid.' Luna thought to herself.

Neither girls vocalized it.

"Then we're done here." Skylar smiled weakly, "I'll leave out the tower- I brought my broom. Don't tell anyone- thank you *so much*, Astoria."

Skylar rolled up the parchment, both girls noticed he had the only copy.

Astoria gave a small regal nod, "If my family needs protection due to this, I expect you to help."

Skylar's smile became more determined, and a fire burned in his eyes, "Don't worry. Nobody is going to hurt you."

Adrian Selwyn

Hadrianus (Riddle?)

- *Went to same orphanage as Suzie Forestar.*
- *Abused by birth family/ young age.*
- *Had familiar/Lutain/snake prior to adoption.*
- *Was blood adopted by Riddle (placed with Bellatrix?).*

- *Familiar understands/comprehends or knows English commands.*
- *Snake tattoo that appears on command (Supposedly?)*
- *Multiple scars/ Supposedly second curse scar (check to make sure).*
- *Blood adoption (Riddle) related to bloodline of thestral*
- *Can see thestrals (witnessed death at young age)*
- *Boggart was Riddle (Riddle picked up Adrian end of year)*
- *Caiman Patronus (false happy memory- tie into child abuse_*
- *Animagus transformation (Supposedly?)*
- *Occlumency (Shield mind from being read?)*
- *Legilimency (Reads minds- required eye contact)*
- *Apparate*
- *Fire spell wandless magic affinity*
- *Temper (Set train on fire, attacked Malfoy) Child abuse tie in?*
- *Boggart was afraid/repelled by Adrian*
- *Has a brother (Birth? Adopt?)*
- *Witnessed death of Suzie Forestar brother (David) at orphanage*
- *Indirectly killed girl ("Left to starve") (Mother? Suzie relative?)*
- *Death Eaters murdered Suzie Forestar when letter was sent inquiring about Adrian (maybe?). Suzie under watch OR Adrian under protection of Death Eaters (Lestrange?).*
- *If under protection of Death Eaters (Bellatrix) why cursed him? Why abandoned in Knockturn Alley? If Suzie was under watch why not removed/killed earlier?*
- *Sick from something, gotten worse since start of year. 'Smells' like 'bubotuber pus'. Head is 'cold' (curse scar?)*
- *Increased temper and more vicious. Less polite or gentle, tired and eats too much food.*

Skylar kept the curtains to his bed drawn, looking at the parchment illuminated by a light charm.

Remus said that Adrian was a weapon, that he had somehow been...*transformed* by Bellatrix with the intent to injure him.

Looking at the list of disjointed statements, if he applied the assumption that Adrian was a weapon to *kill him…*

Well.

"Why would she scar you?" Skylar muttered, curling his knees to his chest and holding them tightly.

The words looked at him, empty, yet something still didn't fit right.

He'd have to ask Remus just to be positive, but...hadn't Adrian sent a plea for help to Remus? In Knockturn, after he had escaped from Bellatrix?

If Bellatrix were protecting him still, and the scar *had* been intentional, why was it something so noticeable? So horrible to look at?

Adrian Selwyn had been injured, and Remus took him in and-

And Remus took him into their lives. He took Adrian into the Order, and kept him safe next to secret members.

Adrian was being protected by Bellatrix, and he *knew the faces of every member of the Order.*

"Shite," Skylar breathed, feeling as if he would vomit. "Shite!"

If Adrian *was* injured on purpose for some...some sort of strange sympathy, then it had certainly been achieved. Occlumency- why would a *child* need to learn to shield their minds? A coping mechanism? A safety feature?

(To find out secret information, and *keep it hidden?)*

Skylar needed to talk to Dumbledore immediately, but he couldn't get a single owl out under the blasted bitch of a headmistress.

She couldn't *keep* him there over Holidays, and Easter was rapidly approaching.

"I just have to last until then," Skylar breathed, still feeling very very ill.

Adrian Selwyn *maybe,* was a spy.

Foal

Chapter Summary

Where everything loved, is slowly broken.

Chapter Notes

I decided to post this so soon because of the crazy Exam schedule, I wanted to let you all have a nice finale for a small while.
This marks the End of Part 2, the next part will resume in a little while.
Fair warning, this chapter is the climax of all the anxiety that's been developing, brace yourself.

(Fanart provided in between the Chapter divisions.)

I'm not weak. I don't know why some things are so difficult, I know they shouldn't be. I'm strong, I'm powerful. I'm not weak, I'm not weak. I'm NOT WEAK.'

February concluded without any problems. That was the unspoken surprise.

The paranoia had grown to such a degree, everyone spoke with whispers and bated breaths. Restrictions increased almost daily, and soon every child felt as if they were shackled every second outside the dorms. Eyes were fixed on the Weasley Twins, who much to the surprise of everyone, hung back and were model students. The calm before the storm, and never had anyone wished more than now that the storm would just *arrive.* The pranks were gone, the playful charms in the corridors were absent, the hallways were silent with the sound of stomping feet. No fires were lit, and the snow melted away.

Headmistress Umbridge was happier, content with her rule as she paraded around with a few select Slytherin students, gifted with authority to freely assign detentions. Daphne Greengrass, Draco Malfoy, a few other arrogant pricks that nobody bothered to recognize. Filch had never been happier.

Adrian hadn't let Lutain out of his *sight,* constantly checking that he was there by tracing the smooth black scales with the pad of his thumb. Even Lutain was forced to hide, normally hidden under a quick glamour, or tucked close to Adrian's heart during the day.

Adrian was forced to do his assignments, completing them ahead of schedule to avoid Snape's wrath or Umbridge's attention. With deadlines drawing close, and the lack of freedom for any sort of enjoyable activity, Adrian had nothing better to do. Adrian didn't attend the Great Hall meals, finding them far too militaristic for his taste.

(And everyone always just *looked at him,* like the unspoken begging would cause him to snap, to cause Umbridge's robes to *burn.*)

The piping that he and Lutain utilized to move around the castle *also* connected to the school kitchens; the house elves were horrified and alarmed the first time the two had wandered through. After interrogating one helpful elf on the student confidentiality protection rules set in place decades ago, Adrian haunted the counter tops often. The elves always fed him stacks of food when he appeared naturally, otherwise they ignored Lutain or Adrian's snake form whenever they appeared.

The elves were incredibly curious as to Adrian's face, obviously never having seen him before around the castle. Although initially incredibly startled, they warmed up rather quickly. That was a relief, the huge owl eyes and wrinkly skin had startled him a fair bit the first time an elf jumped him.

"So strange," Lutain mused, sitting on one of the wooden tables that the house elves had summoned the instance they saw the two emerge from a pipe near the sinks.

Adrian shrugged, tapping his fingers on the table as he reached for the chalice of grape juice.

"They're nice." Adrian replied simply, ignoring the way the nearest elf nearly squealed when it heard that.

"So small, and willing to serve." Lutain peered at the bustling small bodies, *"To live a life serving others, dependent on others. How sad."*

"They enjoy it." Adrian responded simply, shrugging as he took a swig of juice and set the glass down, "They have for centuries."

"To not hunt, but provide for others." Lutain flickered his tongue in the air, *"Are they the rats?"*

"Not everything weaker is considered that, Lutain."

"They provide for others and die if not." Lutain hissed out curiously, *"They are weak, they are rats. Rats live to sustain those better."*

Adrian almost smiled at how philosophical Lutain unknowingly got.

"I don't know," Adrian replied simply, "I don't know if they would be considered rats."

Something popped into existence nearby, startling Adrian enough he accidentally sent a plate with pastries on it flying. The trey rattled across the floor, flaking crust sprinkling the ground like glitter. Adrian mourned the loss, and the house elf that appeared gawked in horror.

"I…" It squeaked, scrambling and snapping multiple times to summon *three* platters stacked with pastries, "Is sorry!"

Lutain cackled in good humor, watching as the elf struggled to apologize before looking victorious. It snapped its fingers, and suddenly a large fat rat appeared, dangling by its tail.

The rat looked similar to Wormtail, except it was clearly feral.

"Oh," Lutain perked up, tongue flickering wildly as he noticed the desperately struggling rodent.

The house elf gently tossed it and Lutain struck with glee, curling around the rodent until it stopped twitching.

"And yousies?" The house elf asked politely, looking at Adrian this time.

"I- you mean a rat?"

"Yes sirs!" The house elf nodded, it's oversized ears flapping, "Yousies sometimes a snake so rat-"

"No thank you," Adrian waved his hand, pointing towards the stack of empty plates and newly procured food on the table, "I'll stick to human food."

"Okay!" The house elf chirped, looking incredibly happy, "Say if yousies wants more! Many plates, you've had six!"

Adrian numbly looked at the stack of plates that he had stacked, sure enough there were six. That was...a lot of food.

Admittedly he had noticed that his hunger had increased exponentially a while back- right after Moody had helped him with whatever potion had increased his magic. Amazingly enough, he hadn't increased in weight, if anything calories seemed to slide off his bones, leaving him thinner than he had ever recalled being.

But his magic *had* increased, exploding outwards with a viciousness and strength unparalleled.

If eating more was all that was needed, well, it was well worth it.

"What would you do? Once you graduated?"

"Would? Are you implying I'm not going to graduate, Luna?"

"You do sleep quite a bit. I think Professor Flitwick thinks you're hibernating."

"I don't sleep that much,"

"Oh, you do, it's quite charming sometimes. Would you sleep after you graduate?"

"Why are you talking like I'm not going to?"

"What would you do, Adrian? What have you always wanted to?"

Easter break was upon them, and very quickly the castle emptied itself of students.A shocking proportion of students actually, eager to flee from under Umbridge's eye. A few people remained- a shocking amount of Slytherins. (The going rumor was something about extra credit, or leniency on assignments.)

Adrian didn't *care.* He was nervous, anxious and highly strung as the predetermined date became closer and closer. He didn't take more than a glance at the list of staying students- only long enough to spot Skylar Potter's name, as well as Luna.

(He hadn't the foggiest notion *why* they would stay- perhaps leaving the train put students under Ministry supervision? A new law Adrian didn't know about? Perhaps it was too dangerous with Dumbledore on the 'run'?)

Adalonda had kept Adrian in the dark, assuring him time and time again that everything was fine. She was purposefully leaving out details although she had answered his questions if he bothered to ask. Adrian chalked it up to just another serpent quirk, Lutain sometimes did something similar.

She assisted with finding the strange cauldron stashed away in one small room. Her body was too

big to fit through the door, although it took a bit of strength to get it out from the decade old door jam. Dust fluttered through the air, ancient equipment interspersed with modern tools that looked far too out of place. It smelled faintly like mildew.

Likely his father had stashed all of the bottles and scales down there decades back. He would have to come back and look through the objects stashed away, he was certain he could find illegal books in the back corners.

The black and red cauldron that Adalonda instructed him to take, looked bizarre. Adrian had never seen anything like it, it looked incredibly impractical. It must have cost a fortune, or taken months to track down. It was dark stone, heavy and cold interspersed with veins of red, running on a single grain through the bowl. Adrian would have loved to shove some of his miscellaneous teeth and claws into it, it would look beautiful on a shelf.

"What is this?" He had asked when he first found it- the cauldron looked more like a ritualistic bowl. Carved out of one piece of rock, like an elaborate mortar.

"Bloodstone." Adalonda responded, watching him through the doorway with one eye, *"take the knife and jars."*

Adrian followed her direction, snatching the jars and vials that had been carefully placed next to the bowl. There was a large silver knife next to it, the blade perhaps the length of his forearm although the hilt was weirdly blunt. Like the bowl, it looked more decorative than functional. It was heavier than he expected, he nearly dropped it when gravity grabbed it suddenly. It must have been solid silver.

Adalonda had been vague, although incredibly useful with instructions. She watched lazily, instructing which ingredient to add to the bowl, and teaching him the pronunciations of the few things he didn't recognize.

The potion didn't need any heat, which was unusual. Normally cold potions required much more precision with ingredients, or were laborious in procedure. This was...*simple.* Adalonda didn't explain what he was sprinkling into the bloodstone bowl towards the end. A few vials and jars were still labeled. The tags yellowed with age, some with a sharp spidery script and other with a store brand watermark on the seals.

Adrian didn't even *want* to know where the *Selkie blood* container came from, or why so much of it had been used.

"Take the knife and place it in." Adalonda instructed him calmly, watching everything with a careful eye. *"Submerge it under."*

Adrian followed suit, expecting a reaction. The blade shimmered in the light, glossy and polished as it was swallowed by the thick viscous potion. Nothing happened, the blade's hilt dipped under the thick black liquid and rested silently on the bottom.

"That's it?" Adrian asked, looking at the mixture with a degree of apprehension.

Adalonda's eyes glowed, *"That's it. Return tomorrow, and we will begin."*

"Saturday then, and I'll be unconscious until Sunday night? Classes start Monday morning, It'll be done by then, right?"

Adalonda flickered her tongue *"It will be done."*

"I don't know, Luna. What do you mean by 'what have I always wanted to do?'"

"Would you be an auror? Or would you live somewhere by the ocean?"

"I- no. I don't know."

"I could see you with creatures, you know. Like Newt Scamander and his farm."

"That's ridiculous."

"Why?"

"It's impractical, Luna."

"Why is it?"

"I-..."

'You don't need the cold to feel numb. You don't need water to feel like you're drowning. I'm useful now.'

"Ready?" Adrian asked Lutain, smiling at the curious snake who was all but thrilled.

"Very!" Lutain hissed back, only illuminated by the many candles Adrian had placed around the room. The candlelight flickered off Lutain's scales, making him look as if coated in gold.

"Call Wormtail." Adalonda instructed, coiling herself into one giant mass in an almost statue worthy pose before them, *"I shall teach you the incantation."*

So it was a spell along with a ritual. Maybe it was a blood ritual? He had certainly poured enough selkie blood to think something along the lines.

"Wormtail!" Adrian shouted, a bit surprised over needing his presence but obliging nonetheless. Adalonda knew the steps, he wasn't right to ask *why* he had to be around. Adrian didn't even realize Wormtail was still around. Adalonda likely had been watching after the man, keeping him fed in the dark.

A rat scurried from the dark corner, watching them the entire time with beady eyes.

"The spell is useless right now." Adalonda warned him, staring with intensity.

"Once it is in place, you will see your breath. You will take that knife, and divide it." Adalonda shifted her head slightly to where the knife had been soaking in the thick black mixture for a day. Adrian couldn't even see the metal through the congealed top surface.

"Then gift your breath to Lutain."

Adrian blinked in confusion, his jaw clenching slightly. It burned, but he had to ask for clarification. "I thought this was mostly a spell?"

"Without the spell you would not have your breath appear." Adalonda explained carefully, sounding reluctant to share information. The spell or ritual must be *very* secret. *"Without the knife you would not split it."*

Adrian nodded, sharply. It was a two part thing then, reliant on the other to work. Adrian knew that old magic generally relied on that concept, although now the codependency wasn't common.

From what he had gathered, the spell would make his...*breath*, whatever that meant, appear. *Breath* was likely a word lost in translation, something from eras back that Adalonda had never learned the translation to. Most likely symbolic, Adrian couldn't imagine *breathing* on Lutain. Once his *breath* appeared (he hadn't the faintest idea what it would appear as- would it be a tangible manifestation?), he would use the knife to...well, cut it in half.

Maybe breaking this mysterious breath would release something in the air? Somehow gift Lutain with some sort of otherworldly ability?

Adrian still didn't know, yet considering how *old* this was, would anyone else know?

How *thrilling,* to be one of the few people in the world to have this knowledge.

(His father would be surprised, his father wouldn't have thought him capable of this. He *knew* that, and he *knew* he could.)

Adrian reached into the bowl, digging his fingers through the thick jelly-like mixture for the metal hilt. His fingers closed around it then he was gently lifting the knife from the potion. It stretched like honey, clinging to the metal which shimmered like a polished stone. The liquid refused to adhere to the blade, sliding off with a small *shhhnk!* It sounded like a sword coming from a sheath.

The silver was cool to the touch, unmarred from its marinade. Adrian's fingertips were stained dark, like he crushed blackberries in his palm.

"Alright, what's the incantation?" Adrian asked, feeling excitement buzz through his chest.

Adalonda told him, Adrian repeated it back until the great basilisk approved.

"Okay, I'm ready." Adrian breathed slowly through his nose to calm his nerves, "What do I do?"

Adalonda's mouth opened, the thick smell of her breath puffed into Adrian's face, caressing his cheeks. *"Turn the rat to a man."*

Adrian looked over his shoulder towards the outer edge of the candle light. He spotted the rat, huddled and shivering like a molding potato. "Turn back."

The rat paused, obviously thinking things through. After a few seconds, Wormtail shifted back. Adrian was surprised at the differences. The man was thin, obviously he had dropped an immense amount of weight. There were shadows under his eyes, deep bruises on his gaunt skull.

He also had a seething glare on his face, wishing Adrian a long painful death.

It didn't matter to him. Wormtail was beneath him, Wormtail was a rat.

"Good, Cerestes." Adalonda crooned, soothing as she exhaled into the air- hot and heavy.

"You would do anything, for Lutain, right?" Adalonda asked, sounding rhetoric until she looked at him expectantly.

"Of course I would." Adrian frowned, looking at her in growing frustration. He knew that she doubted his ability. He had reassured her *enough,* why was she so distrusting? Why did she think so *little of him?*

"Cerestes," Adalonda crooned, lowering her head until it was touching the floor, eye level to Adrian's face, *"Kill the man."*

Adrian flinched and stumbled one step back, "I- *What?"*

Adalonda's tongue flicked the air- feathery kisses along Adrian's neck, *"Kill the man, or the spell will not work."*

Adrian shook his head, *"No, no Adalonda. There, there has to be another way. I can't just…"*

"It's the only way." Adalonda responded bluntly, pausing before huffing a disappointed noise.

She slowly lifted her head, turning to look away and begin to *leave.*

"I knew better than to expect so much." She sighed, sounding disappointment, *"The other and Nagini had such promise. Nothing you have."*

"That's not true!" Adrian shouted, staring at her in disbelief and quickly rising panic, "I- Adalonda no!"

"There's no point to stay here. You're weak." She paused, before very carefully pronouncing, *"You're useless."*

"I am not useless!" Adrian screamed, tears stinging as his hands shook and clenched. No- *no.* He was *not* going to think like that- he was *not* going to let those thought drag him down to the mud. He wouldn't let some sort of- of insecurities ruin what he had worked so hard to come to terms with. "I- Adalonda I'm *not useless!"*

His voice didn't waver this time, it only reached a shrieking level of his frustration. Wormtail flinched at the noise, staring silently with a beady hateful expression.

"You can't even kill someone! You can't even strike like a noble kind! You're a rat," She egged, swinging back to peer over her length through the dark at him, *"If you were hatchling, I'd leave you to die."*

Adrian stumbled back with a wet sounding noise leaving his throat.

No. No he would *not* think like that.

"I would not be surprised if you are left." Adalonda continued, looking at him with a blank expression, *"I would."*

No no, he couldn't let- he couldn't think like that-

"No- no…" Adrian was shaking, and oh, how pitiful that looked. Guilt and shame bubbled in his throat like tar. The knife almost slipped from between his fingers, cold to the touch. "...Adalonda no…"

Adalonda barely considered him, perhaps she was just ashamed of him as he was. *"So stubborn. So useless, and because of you, Lutain will die."*

Adrian's heart stopped.

She wasn't ashamed of him, she was...she was *angry.* She was disappointed because he had- he had inspired a false hope that perhaps another one she held dear would not die. He had made her hopeful, and his own...his own *weakness* was ruining that.

Adalonda considered him with disgust, *"Your inability to me, is to kill Lutain. You're useless."*

He couldn't save his friend.

(He could feel it wiggling through his brain like maggots, feeding on his lobes with munching maws. *'Maybe I am? If I can't help the ones I care about- perhaps I am useless.'*)

"No I'm not." Adrian whispered, voice inaudible in the chamber, "I...please don't leave me."

Adalonda's scales shifted as she slithered, moving away from where he stood with a knife in his hands. She wasn't coming back.

"Adalonda!" He screamed, waiting, and still she moved further. Lutain was silent nearby, watching and not interrupting. Was he disappointed too? Had Adrian broken *his* hope also?

'I'm useful. I'm useful. I'm useful.'

The fine tether, constructed of desperation and hysteria snapped.

Adrian's breathing was by no means steady, but at this point it didn't matter.

He didn't matter.

Lutain needed to- Lutain needed to be okay.

Adrian didn't need to be, *he* didn't need to be. Lutain had to be. Lutain had to be okay.

(What point is all of this, if in the end, Lutain is dead and it's all because of your own weakness?)

'Is it right to do terrible things for someone you care about?'

What did it matter, if in the end the only one left to judge you is yourself?

Adrian was sobbing something messy, hitched and gross as he clutched his wand tightly, palms sweating. His face likely looked disgusting, but his head was clear and his heart throbbed with sorrow.

Wormtail was still pissed, although looking more and more perturbed by second.

"I- A…" Adrian gulped air, his vision blurring.

"I-"

"Master?" Lutain asked quietly, trying to possibly comfort him, *"He's just a rat."*

A rat.

Just a rat.

'A rat for a snake. A weakling, for the strong.'

Remus would be so sad with him- but didn't Remus have similar problems? Didn't he too struggle with bloodlust, the ability to grab someone by the throat and claw their throat out?

If Remus blamed Adrian for this- and judged it as something irredeemable, then he was a hypocrite.

(Luna would be so sad with him.)

"I- I'm sorry." Adrian choked, words almost entirely unrecognizable around the lump in his throat. He didn't know who he was apologizing to, if it was for the rat before him, or someone unknowing.

"Wha-" Wormtail started, eyes widening as self preservation kicked in.

Adrian knew the spell, he knew it.

He could do it.

He was *useful.*

(He would prove it.)

"A-Avada Kedavra."

There was a flash, and a twist in Adrian's stomach. Wormtail fell to the ground with a hollow thud. His body bounced, bones rolling with the impact, elastic tendons snapping. He settled after hitting his skull twice on the ground, a strange impulsive gurgle from his diaphragm. Wormtail's eyes were glassy.

Adrian keeled over and *hurled.*

It was disgustingly thick, chunky; a mixture of everything he had recently eaten. It tasted disgusting, burning his nose and mouth as he sobbed and *gagged.*

"The spell." Adalonda prompted him, sounding forced calm. She hadn't left then, she had waited.

Right. Adrian stuttered it out, repeating it twice just to make sure it worked. Then his skin prickled, like the summer sun had caused his flesh to sizzle. He felt like he was shedding, some part of him breaking away that he hadn't ever thought of as him.

When he tore out his hair and let it flutter to the ground- was it still him? When blood from his nose splattered on cobblestone, when did *he* end, and *blood* begin?

Adrian looked at his chest, watched as something blue *dripped out.* Blue and hazy, thick like smoke that congealed in a small spinning orb of light, the size of a grapefruit. It seeped from his pores, thick and waxy- evaporating and shaping itself into something new.

His breath, or whatever it was.

It was beautiful, but at the same time there was something wrong with it; parts were tainted and darker in colour, twisted chunks where it looked almost necrotic. Mud that had dried too quickly under the sun, sandstone eroded from a storm.

"The knife."

Right. Right the knife.

Adrian's hand was shaking so hard he had to drop his wand to hold the silver blade with two hands, gripping the hilt to try and steady the shaking.

Split it in half. Give it to Lutain.

"The knife, Cerestes ."

Adrian reeled back and *stabbed.*

It hurt.

It hurt bad enough it felt like Bellatrix had cursed him again.

It felt like his father's stare, his red eyes and disappointed frown as he whispered the curse lovingly.

Crucio through his bones, vibrating and arcing through his bones like Adalonda's venom.

The blue orb had cracked, leaking something clear that dripped over his hands like blood. It sizzled on his skin, tingling like magic.

He stuck the knife in harder, feeling and seeing the crack strain further.

His knees gave out and he dropped; the orb followed his elevation even as he slammed onto the ground. Adrian curled up, seizing as the crack spread, splitting further and further even without his knife's edge.

Adrian had never felt such agony in his life- eternal and overwhelming and he just wanted it to *end.*

Kill me Kill me Kill me killmekillmekillme

"Give it to Lutain." Adalonda rumbled, somewhere unseen and only felt.

Lutain. Right, Lutain needed- he needed-

Lutain had to live.

Live Lutain Lutain Lutain.

"Lutain." He croaked out, reaching out but not feeling the black coils.

Killmekillmekillmekillme

It reached a crescendo, and there was a sound of something snapping, the clean crack of glass or bone.

(It echoed, the melodic noise of wind chimes, of silver bells.)

Adrian's back arched as something wet spread through his mouth; he vomited blood and whimpered like a dying dog.

His eyes rolled back in his head and at some point between one wave of agony and the next; he passed out.

"Well...I don't know how to explain it, Luna."

"You could try?"

"Creatures don't seem to like me anymore. Like they're scared of me, like I'm...Like I smell like some sort of predator ready to eat them."

"Things that are scared of you can learn to love you. You just need to show them that you're not

going to hurt them."

"You don't understand, Luna."

"Hey Hermione, can I ask you a question?" Skylar asked, looking across from his armchair to where Hermione was buried behind stacks of books. Break was almost over, yet she hadn't stopped studying once during the holiday.

She poked her head up, hair secured out of her face by a messy ponytail, "Yes Sky?"

Skylar sighed and thought through the phrasing, "Hypothetical, I mean."

Hermione sensed that something was amiss and slowly set her quil down. She placed a bookmark in her book, closing it gently.

She turned, giving him her full attention.

"Now, I'm not trying to sound…" Skylar's voice was pinched, "I..Okay, I need you to…"

"Skylar?" Hermione asked, her brows pinched with worry, "What is it?"

Skylar lent forward and placed his head in his hands, "Hermione I don't want to think about this but I *know* I have to."

Hermione reached out to place her hand on his knee, reassuring him, "I'll help however I can. I know that with that… that *woman* watching our mail we can't reach out, but I'll listen. What's bothering you?"

Skylar looked at her and chewed his lower lip, he looked torn. Hermione noticed how ill his face twisted, as if he had been thinking of something for a long time. "I...It's only because I *need* someone else's thoughts. And I can't reach my *bloody* dad or-" Skylar flinched and stared furiously at the wall, stopping his rant then and there. "Dumbledore thinks...he thinks that maybe *maybe* Adrian was...He thinks that he may try to hurt us."

Hermione straightened and she frowned sharply, that was a serious accusation. She had thought better of Skylar. It was a ridiculous assumption to make on another student. "Skylar, Adrian wouldn't-"

"I know," Skylar agreed, voice a little higher, "but I want to think about this *hypothetically.* I don't think...I *like* Adrian, but I want to consider everything."

Hermione obviously wasn't happy with the discussion, it was complete nonsense to her but Skylar looked quite distressed. If anything, she could at least run with his silly theory until he was able to talk to the Order members. Maybe he'd finally get some sleep that way.

She sighed and gave a small nod, already feeling guilty for Adrian."Alright, I'll try to think about what he'd do *if* that was the case."

She made it very clear she didn't think it was, but Skylar nodded finally at peace. He leaned back on his chair, but his expression shifted again almost instantly. How on Earth had he gotten so worked up over this?

"If...If for some reason, Adrian was working with *Voldemort-"*

"Sky…" Hermione trailed off warningly, fighting the urge to get up and storm out right then.

"I know, trust me I hate this too," Skylar grumbled, and in truth he *did* look upset. "But...has there ever been a time where...where he told you something you thought was *wrong?"*

Hermione bit her lip worriedly, something about this didn't feel right. "Skylar, I don't think-"

"Trust me, 'Mione," Skylar grimaced, "I'm trying to consider every possibility."

Hermione stared at him before she looked down at her hands, fiddling with them.

There was such an instant, she remembered it clearly. It had bothered her quite a bit, but since the topic was a sensitive one now she hadn't dared ever bringing her concerns to light. It was likely nothing, there were trained aurors and adults on the case, it was silly to think that *she* had anything important to say.

Skylar looked upset, like he was clinging for anything. It wasn't as if what she suspected could possibly be true anyways.

"There was...do you remember our second year? When we used Polyjuice to sneak into the Slytherin Dorms?"

Skylar smiled faintly, "Adrian was furious afterwards."

Hermione nodded, looking off and unsure, "He...You remember Slytherin's monster? How it was never...never found?"

"Yeah," Skylar nodded quietly, pausing and letting the silence fill the gap.

Hermione shifted, chewing on her lip. She hated to be wrong.

"I thought I knew what the monster was, no, I *know* what the monster is. But...Adrian told me I was wrong- and...I don't know." She trailed off, voice almost warbling, "He...I mean he *knows* creatures better than I do so I thought that…"

"He convinced you that you were wrong." Skylar felt like he was chewing soap, a bitter taste in his mouth, "and you dropped it."

Hermione nodded slowly, "I...I shouldn't have, but...I don't know. Too many things didn't line up with it."

Skylar entertained the thought; he could see why Hermione had doubted herself if Adrian shut her down. Adrian was a force, an unstoppable object. Talking to him about a few topics- well...If Adrian wanted, Skylar was sure that boy could have persuaded Skylar into thinking a broom was a chair.

"Do you remember the snake? When you were dueling Draco?"

Skylar gave a bark of laughter, "I'd never forget that."

Hermione looked even more unsure, as if she was reaching new levels of conspiracy theories. "Well, we never saw that summoned snake be *banished* and it just sort of vanished in the crowd-"

Hermione cut herself off quickly, reaching up to undo her hair tie and run her fingers through the messy locks.

"Hermione." Skylar urged, "Please, I just...what's your theory?"

Hermione shook her head, her hair bouncing around chaotically. "It's stupid, Sky."

Skylar waited, and let Hermione gather her thoughts. A second passed, and Hermione blurted words like they would burn her. "Well...I- I don't know for sure but...didn't the snake you fought look a *lot* like Adrian's familiar."

Skylar gaped, "No, no *way."*

Hermione looked guilty, "I mean, I don't remember him well and I wasn't *that* good friends with him, and honestly to me all snakes look the same but...I never wanted to think that...that he'd spread such a rumor but…"

"He'd...he *framed me?"* Skylar's voice rose a notch, "As the *heir?"*

Why would he do that?

"I thought about it for a long time too," Hermione muttered sourly, "and...and I couldn't think as to *why*...except…"

Skylar thought quickly, and back to the list hidden carefully under his textbooks and old Chocolate Frog wrappers. Adrian Selwyn's snake understood English, which was something impressive considering that familiars *shouldn't* know English. They just...they were assumed to have an inclination for understanding *one* person. A familiar understanding or even *obeying* someone else suggested a high level of intelligence impossible for nonverbal communication, far higher than just a normal animal. Astoria Greengrass had panicked the moment they closed the door, screaming about a *snake.*

"Lutain is an animagus." Skylar spoke out loud, almost chastising himself the second after he said it.

Hermione thankfully didn't scowl but blushed slightly, "I had thought the same, but...but I think that Adrian could...*understand* it."

Skylar tried to understand what Hermione was suggesting, "Familiar's are connected-"

"No no, I mean…." Hermione looked on the verge of crying. What kind of horrible person was she to say such terrible things? To imply that another *student* could... "He- don't you think it was a bit strange that you were framed for being a *parselmouth?"*

'There were hundreds of things you could have been framed for, easier things. Why parseltongue?'

"No- no way." Skylar blinked in alarm, his mouth falling open in surprise, "You think that...that Adrian may be a...a *parsel-"*

Hermione leaned forward with wide eyes, her face pale and a bit shaken. "I- I want to say that I feel *terrible* over this, and I'm likely just...just plucking straws out of nowhere, but...I mean, I *know* that I'm leaping to conclusions but sometimes he knows things that he *shouldn't,* but that his snake *did."*

Skylar wanted to instantly argue about Legilimency, that information could have easily have been obtained that way. Hermione didn't know about that, and with how upset she was now, Skylar had no intentions of showing her.

Familiar's didn't communicate with words, more through emotions and sensations. There wouldn't be a way to accurately report back information or anything overheard. Spying through a Familiar

would have been impossible, he would have only gotten impressions on people, emotional responses.

'If Adrian was a parselmouth, what would he be able to do that nobody else could?'

He could talk to snakes...was there more?

"Hermione, what do you think the monster is?'

Hermione looked at Skylar in the eyes, "I...I thought that it was this...this *legendary* beast called a Basilisk."

Skylar frowned as he tried to remember where he had heard the name, "A...the medusa snake?"

Hermione shook her head, straightening unconsciously in preparation to teach. "No, that's a different one, *well*, there are similarities. Basilisks...they kill everything that they look at. They're the king of serpents, and have a crown on their head and bright red plumes…Sky, Basilisks are said to be *horrible monsters."*

Skylar's eyebrows furrowed, "Okay this Basilisk- I mean, let's run with it being a Basilisk. If it's a snake monster, running with the parselmouth idea...then… the monster would have *killed* people by looking at them, but nobody *died."*

Besides Ginny Weasley.

"I thought of that," Hermione added helpfully, her lower lip beading with blood as her teeth finally broke through. "Every time someone was petrified, they didn't look at it *directly.* Then, it just…. vanished."

"You think that Adrian opened the chamber," Skylar gasped, his voice going hoarse in horror, "You think that he controlled the *monster."*

Hermione's eyes widened and she shook her head back and forth, "No! No, Adrian would *never*- Skylar we're talking about *theories,* Adrian *did not-"*

'I left her to starve to death!'

He was so distraught, Skylar could never forget the hysterical shrieking. What if it wasn't just...what if it was *guilt?*

"What did the wall say." Skylar couldn't breathe, "When Ginny vanished. Hermione*, what did the wall say."*

"I- Her skeleton will lie in the chamber forever. I'd never forget it" Hermione recited with a flinch, "Sky, Sky what's going *on.* You- you cannot *seriously* be presuming that-"

Things clicked into place, the final fact that had been biting Skylar's brain ever since he made that list.

The snake- the familiar. He had it since a young age, but having a familiar from such a young age was *unheard* of. What if Adrian could *talk* to it? What if he could speak to it and *understood* each other? That wasn't by any means a stretch then- for all purposes it would have looked like a familiar bond.

The Blood adoption was *after* being adopted, but the parseltongue was before. Did Adrian...was

Adrian *related* to someone, someone that was supposed to be a secret? Someone that would be *obvious?*

Why did Bellatrix Lestrange pick him? Why did Bellatrix Lestrange pick *him?*

(Why would Adrian need to know Occlumency? What if he had something to *hide?)*

If what Astoria said was true...if what she said was right, then Suzie Forestar went to the same orphanage as Adrian (before he was Adrian?). Astoria wanted to know about him, about Adrian *before* he was adopted, and Bellatrix killed her only lead. What could Suzie Forestar *have known?*

(What would a child have displayed in public? What sort of skill would Adrian have done that, in retrospect, would have *ruined* him? Adrian Selwyn skipped classes, he set trains on fire, he *broke Draco's skull*, what small tiny thing could he, and Bellatrix Lestrange, want to keep hidden?)

"We have to go." Skylar spoke, leaping to his feet and yanking Hermione to hers, "We- *Ron!"* He screamed towards the stairwell. They were lucky almost all of Gryffindor bailed for Easter, leaving just the three in the tower.

Seconds later there was a hollow thud, then Ron stuck his head out to look down the stairs in alarm, "Sky?"

"Get the cloak!" Skylar shouted, eyes wide and nostrils flaring, "We've got to go, *right now."*

'If that's true, if all of that is true, then we need to go right now. It's too dangerous here, nowhere is safe.'

Hermione shook her head frantically, "Skylar we don't *know!"*

Something pulsed in frustration, and Skylar wanted to punch a *wall.* Hermione was his friend, but she was so naive. What was the worst that would happen- they'd get expelled? That didn't *matter,* with what Skylar had figured out, nobody here was *safe.*

Merlin's beard, a girl- Suzie Forestar, was *dead.*

"Hermione I love you to death but I *need* you to trust me." Skylar rushed out, "You have an owl in your room?"

Hermione looked baffled, "Ah- yes. Sky you can't sent an owl outside of-"

"Send one *now.* Luna Lovegood, please, tell her it's *urgent."*

"I've got it." Ron hurried down the stairs clutching the invisibility cloak over his head. Hermione bolted up the stairs, looking far too startled to not follow Skylar's request.

Ron blinked in confusion, wrinkling his eyebrows in a weird face, "What's this about?"

"Selwyn," Skylar clipped out, eyes flashing, "Ron, *don't.* We...we need to get Selwyn out of here- the Shrieking Shack is past the apparition line, we need to get him to headquarters."

Ron looked baffled, "I- mate we can't apparate! Are you barmy?"

"Selwyn can!" Skylar shouted, staring at the steps until Hermione hurried down the staircase, nearly tripping in her haste.

"I- I told her to meet us in the front entrance." Hermione hurried in a hush, "Skylar you don't even know where he *is."*

"Luna will!" Skylar retorted, flinging the cloak over their shoulders and ushering them towards the stairs and out of the castle.

The cloak was too short for all of them to wear, so Hermione cast the best disillusionment spell she could over their feet and Skylar cast the best muffling charm he knew. Ron was surprisingly helpful, pointing and shoving them to the side whenever one of the Slytherin monitors slipped into sight.

("I live with Fred and George," Ron grinned breathless and proud as he expertly maneuvered them past Filch, "You think I wouldn't know how to sneak around after curfew?")

They hurried to the grand entrance, moonlight from the nearly full moon slid through the windows. Luna was standing near one window, looking incredibly lackluster but almost ethereal when the white light caught her hair. Skylar was momentarily impressed with how swiftly she had gotten their response. Maybe she had snuck out to the owlery?

Luna didn't see or hear them approach/Her face was haunted looking, especially anxious and somber as if she was expecting something truly horrid. Skylar felt guilty, that he had nothing positive to say.

He would apologize later, for now this was more important then just her.

Skylar pulled the cloak off, revealing himself and his friends suddenly. Luna nearly jumped, a small inhale the only noise in the silence of the night.

"Luna," Skylar greeted, and something in his face must have shown because her expression fell slightly.

"Oh no," She stated quietly, like funeral bells, "What has he done now?"

Ron and Hermione exchanged a look, looking incredibly uncomfortable with being out so late in such an exposed area.

"Hopefully nothing. We need to get him out of here, *now."* Skylar reported with a foreboding expression, "We need to get him out of here, he can apparate but I don't know how many…"

"The thestrals." Luna responded quickly. She had apparently thought about this before then, which had chilling ramifications. "They can fly you wherever you need to go."

"Skylar! We can't just leave!" Hermione hissed quietly, mindful that they were in fact, breaking curfew.

"Then *I'll go."* Skylar hissed back, "Luna, do you know where he is?"

Luna blinked and looked worried, "I- He was gone all day. I don't know, I'm worried for him."

"Does your dad still have the map?" Ron blurted, looking at Skylar with a slightly unsure expression, "Or, do you have any tracking spells? For the second task?"

Hermione shook her head quickly, "Tracking spells don't work on people! Our magical cores make it imposs-"

"Track Lutain," Luna spoke like a shadow, "Adrian hasn't been letting him leave his side for weeks."

Skylar nodded, looking at Hermione who sighed but held her wand flat on her palm, "Point Me Lutain!"

Skylar wasn't sure if it would actually work until he saw her wand twist, spinning until it pointed in a direction that clearly wasn't the dungeons.

Skylar didn't even pause, he took off at a sprint. The muffling charm was still in effect and thankfully Luna bolted after casting a similar spell at her feet.

Hermione gasped as her wand spun, pointing in another direction. They scrambled to keep up with the random shifts in movement.

Skylar felt a small warmth, that even without knowing the entire situation, his friends were willing to chase him into danger.

"Where is this snake!" Ron grunted, out of breath as he tried to keep up, "It's like its in the bloody walls!"

"Pipes!" Hermione blurted, looking at Skylar horrified, "That's- the basilisk!"

"Basilisk?" Luna echoed, eyes wide in silent horror although still a bit puzzled. She hadn't clued in then. "Oh dear."

"There!" Ron shouted, squinting through the dark. Skylar's eyes focused on something in the shadows, a flash of movement that was too impossible to discern in the shadows. Skylar skidded to a stop, pointed his wand and hoped to Merlin this would work.

Skylar belted out in a strangled yelp. *"Accio Lutain!"*

There was a second before something long and black *flew* through the air, it smacked into his outstretched hand. Snake coils were surprisingly warm, dry and *writhing*.

It was hissing, spitting and flailing like an incredibly agitated animal.

(Well, Lutain *was* an agitated animal.)

"Mobiliarbus!" Hermione cast, levitating the writhing creature away from Skylar's fleshy fingers.

"Lutain!" Someone yelped, stumbling out of the dark shadows with a swaying walk, looking dazed and very sick. Skylar took one glance before he did a second take in dumbfounded puzzlement. Skylar hadn't ever thought about sounds being used for a description, yet looking at Adrian, all he could think of was untuned piano strings. Off key, a morbid joke of what should be soft and gentle.

Luna made a noise like she was choking, Skylar felt like he had swallowed a bug. Luna took a stumbling step backwards, a violent shiver nearly tripped her and took her to the floor.

"What have you *done?"* Luna asked, holding her wand out in front of her defensively.

Her arm was shaking as she pointed it directly at Adrian.

Adrian looked feverish, almost baffled where he was standing as if drunken. He swayed slightly, torso shifting back and forth as if undulating.

"Skylar Potter? *You!"* Adrian asked with a small slur, his mood changing to something *furious*- his words so similar to a hiss Skylar felt sick.

The whiplash between confused and vindictive was a whirlwind. Luna choked again, reaching out to steady herself on Ron's shoulder. Hermione looked far too unstable, clutching the invisibility cloak to her chest as if a security blanket.

"Adrian." Skylar spoke, his voice deadpan although he was almost trembling. Was it custom to lower oneself to the ground when speaking to a wild animal? Should he hold his arms out to show he was unarmed?

There was something wrong with him. It was too dark to tell, but Skylar felt fairly certain that if he were to cast lumos, Adrian's pupils would be dilated past the normal level. He was inebriated of some sort, not operating at his normal facilities.

Lutain was spitting, hissing a fury as he writhed in the air above them.

"*You* I…" Adrian suddenly flinched, a whole body movement that almost looked like a bucket of ice water had been dumped on him. He blinked dumbly, completely dismissing Skylar's presence entirely. "I- Luna?"

Suddenly calm, still dazed but simply confused.

Hermione leant over to Skylar's ear, "Something isn't right!"

Skylar knew that, and based on Luna's retching noises she knew also. If it was stolen firewhiskey, Luna wouldn't be so...so *ill.* It was almost as if she had tasted something rotten, like some bad smelling potion ingredien-

Bubotuber pus.

"Luna, you okay?" Skylar asked her, careful to keep the black snake away from hurting anyone.

Luna was sniffling, shaking on the ground from her kneeling position as she stared at Adrian with wide traumatized eyes, "You...you smell like *carrion."*

"Well well, look who we have here." Someone said with a slightly amused but high cold voice.

Pristine and polite, a Slytherin girl with long blonde hair walked out with her wand raised high and an expression of amusement at the sight of Adrian, "Headmistress Umbridge is going to be very disappointed, Selwyn."

Adrian blinked once before his facial expression shifted into something *savage,* "Oh *piss off* Daphne!"

Daphne Greengrass, Astoria's sister.

Daphne Greengrass was on Umbridge's squad of student officers, she had remained over the holidays. She was essentially Umbridge's right hand helper, obviously assigned a night shift.

Shite shite shite

"I think not, Selwyn." Daphne's face was cold although she held her wand securely, "I was hoping to catch you on your own, surely you'd be expelled then. A group though...a shame."

Luna struggled to get off the floor, still looking pained, "Daphne we need to leave Hogwarts-"

'No! Luna!'

Daphne pointed her wand at Luna without looking at her, her expression no nonsense, "Shut it, Lovegood."

She obviously knew that Adrian was a threat, which was chilling to think of.

(Wasn't he? In this hallway, Adrian Selwyn, even while impaired, was the biggest threat around.)

"Daphne please," Skylar tried, knowing that his voice was strained, "We...we need to get to the forest-"

"Skylar Potter if you say one more word, I'm going to stun all of you and drag you to Filch's office myself." Daphne snapped.

"Astoria's letter!" Skylar blurted, almost panting from how high stress the situation was.

Daphne froze, turning to look at Skylar.

'I'm so sorry Astoria, but if this works you'll be safe.'

"What?" Daphne asked calmly. She wasn't though, her eyes had widened, the whites bright in the dark. Her skin was paling to porcelain in the torchlight.

Just in time, loud recognizable clicking shoes broke the silence. Umbridge emerged from the dark, looking proud and cocky- Daphne must had triggered an alarm the moment she found the group. Daphne must have been trying to find Adrian for a while now- to expel him.

No, no this was very bad. Something was wrong with Adrian, and knowing the boy he would only lash out if they revealed they knew anything. Yet considering how much Adrian was swaying...would calling in an auror team be overkill?

(No. No it wouldn't.)

"Well done Ms. Greengrass!" Umbridge chirped, clapping her hands together in glee, "What was the *famous Golden Boy* and friends doing out at this time of night," her eyes narrowed although her lips kept a happy smile, "*Hmm?"*

Skylar hated that noise.

Adrian twitched, spasming uncontrollably down his legs before he glared, unadulterated rage twisting his eyes. He bared his teeth, like something wild.

Daphne didn't blink, and her face didn't change.

'Please Daphne,' Skylar begged in his head. *'Please.'*

"I heard them discussing a weapon in the Forbidden Forest, Ma'am."

Umbridge looked *pleased,* "Ah yes, *Dumbledore's weapon."*

Daphne locked eyes with Skylar, blank and unreadable. She knew about Astoria's letter, Astoria must have told her what she suspected. That Adrian somehow had something to do with Suzie Forestar's death.

Daphne *understood* that Skylar was trying to remove Adrian Selwyn, or trying to get him away. If

Skylar ever had the opportunity, he would thank that girl with every fiber of his being.

"I'll take things from here, Ms. Greengrass." Umbridge smiled, sacchrine and irritating, "Off you tot."

Daphne walked away with a stiff back, not looking back once. She faded into the dark, away from the danger into security.

"Well then." Umbridge supplied with a vicious grin, "Shall we?"

"If I don't understand, can you try and explain it to me again?"

"It's….Luna it's...magical things, they used to like me. They used to...I don't know, it sounds stupid."

"I don't think it sounds stupid."

"Magical things, they used to like me. They don't anymore."

'I'm so sor- No. I just- I didn't mean to. I didn't know what else to do. I just- I'm so confused. I was confused. I didn't know that would happen- I mean, I knew it would but I just- It didn't seem real. It didn't seem possible. I left you down there in the cold, and the dark. Was that the wrong thing? Was that really the wrong thing to do?'

They exited the hallways, through the corridors of the sleeping castle until the nighttime air chilled their skin and their breaths puffed gently in the air.

Umbridge walked at the head of their chain, keeping her wand poised and pointed at Hermione who grudgingly lead the group; Umbridge finding her the biggest threat at the moment. Of course, Umbridge had stolen their wands, stashing them in her oversized pink pockets.

(Skylar found that the greatest irony, that Umbridge couldn't recognize that Adrian, poor poor Adrian, was likely the biggest threat in the entire castle.)

Umbridge showed only slight uncertainty in her steps as Hermione lead them past Hagrid's hut, sleeping silently in the night. The dew from the grass stuck to Skylar's shoes.

"In there," Hermione pointed coldly into the dark forest. Her face was ticked, barely any fear in her eyes.

Umbridge frowned, "*In* the forbidden forest? Not near it?"

Of course not you overgrown louse, if it was sitting in the sunlight a secret weapon wouldn't be that secret.

Luna peeked out, keeping her body behind Adrian with her thin arms wrapped around his torso. Skylar hadn't a clue what had gotten into him, but periodically on the path down he had heard the boy whisper to himself almost manic- the large black snake coiling and hissing in rage above their heads in a protective bubble. Had he been sneaking potions? Skylar had heard the rumors, but- but *drugs* were something impossible to think about.

"Dumbledore didn't want any students stumbling on it." Luna spoke up, her voice wobbly and shaking as if she had been struck.

Oh Hermione was *brilliant.* Knowing Luna, she likely had swarms of magical creatures ready to pounce on Umbridge, Hermione was smart to take the lead, not that she had much choice. Given how much Umbridge actually *knew* about her students, she likely thought that Hermione was the mastermind behind everything. Skylar doubted she even knew Luna's *name.*

"Of course," Umbridge stated, although she sounded a little apprehensive now. "Of course...very well, then...you stay ahead of me."

Skylar and Ron tried to catch Hermione's eye as they neared the first trees. Adrian and Luna stayed in the back, the girl soothing or quieting the occasional incoherent murmurs and (chillingly unnerving) moans and whimpers.. Skylar was beginning to feel uneasy- walking into the Forest without wands seemed to him like one of the worse ideas he'd followed through with. At least there weren't any dragons in the forest anymore.

'Oh but don't forget the probably lethal snake hovering above your head.'

Hermione started a brisk walk, one that had the entire chain struggling to keep up. Although Luna was moving with more ease than all of them combined, she was stuck dragging the unusually clumsy Adrian over roots and branches.

Ron leaned in towards Skylar quietly, "Think he's drugged?"

So Ron had noticed too. It was unlikely to be drugs, Adrian wasn't so stupid to do that in public where he could be found. It had to be something else, but Skylar didn't know what.

Skylar shook his head subtly, watching carefully along the sides of the path for anything to leap out at them. Hermione nearly stamped down the undergrowth. Ron and Skylar exchanged worried looks- they were making quite the racket.

Umbridge tripped over a fallen nearby sapling. The snake, contained by the magical bubble, lunged at her as if it could break through. Nobody paused on the march to help her upright, even as her coat tore on a stray branch.

They walked on for what seemed like a long time, until they were so deep in the Forest that the dense arching tree branches above blocked out the starlight.

Ron gulped and looked around nervously; Skylar felt as if hundreds of eyes were watching him.

"How much further?" demanded Umbridge angrily, and suddenly, Adrian inhaled loudly and harshly, then succumbed to low giggles.

"And what are you-" Umbridge turned, pointing the wand threateningly at the other boy.

No no, don't threaten him-

An arrow flew through the air and landed with a menacing thud in the tree over Umbridge's head. The air was suddenly full of the sound of hooves; Skylar could feel the forest trembling.

Umbridge spun with a scream, grabbing Ron to use him as some sort of shield. Ron kicked out, stumbling away as the group slowly looked at the circle of hooved creatures watching them; at least twenty centaurs were emerging on every side equipped with wooden bows raised and loaded at the group.

Hermione looked alarmed, but distinctly relieved at something. Luna searched for a single centaur in particular, brow furrowed until she relaxed suddenly. Thank Merlin for that, if Skylar had to be lost in the Forbidden Forest with anyone, he'd always pick Luna.

"Who are you?" One centaur demanded, a chestnut-bodied one with his bow cocked. He emerged from the ranks, circling around to point the arrow tip towards Umbridge, "Who are you, human?"

"I am Dolores Umbridge!" said woman spoke in a high-pitched, terrified voice. "Senior Undersecretary to the Minister for Magic and Headmistress and High Inquisitor of Hogwarts!"

Many of the centaurs shifted restlessly, casting looks off into the forest in an opposite direction.

"You are from the Ministry of Magic?" said the centaur, eyes narrowed and nostrils flaring.

"That's right!" she nearly screeched, "So you should-"

One of the centaurs gave a ragged gasp, a stumbling sound as its legs appeared to tremble slightly, "You brought *it!"*

Skylar wasn't sure what had scared it until a low murmur spread through the centaurs and they shifted their aim towards Luna.

"What?" Umbridge gasped in surprise, "I- are you *ignoring me?"*

The centaur who was in charge didn't even glance her way, "Your status is insignificant and hence we care naught for you."

Umbridge gaped wordlessly for a few moments, "I...*Excuse me?"*

"What are you doing in our Forest! Why are you here?" bellowed a hard-faced grey centaur.

"Your Forest?" said Umbridge, shaking from indignation, "I would remind you that you live here only because the Ministry of Magic permits you certain areas of land-"

An arrow flew so close to her head that it nearly sliced her hair; she let out a scream and threw her hands over her head. The centaurs hadn't even spared her a look, still staring at Luna in fright. What had Luna *done?*

"You are unimportant here, *human."* One centaur spat, shifting as if Umbridge was little but dirt.

Umbridge flushed in rage but it was too late: Umbridge pointed her wand at the chestnut centaur and screamed, "Incarcerous!"

Ropes flew out of midair like thick snakes, wrapping themselves tightly around the centaur's torso and trapping his arms to his sides. The centaur gave a cry of rage and reared onto his hind legs, attempting to free himself.

Arrows flew and Umbridge cast a hasty shielding charm; Skylar felt smug as he *knew* that his spell was better.

The centaurs did not seem happy, instead they looked torn between fury and panic.

"Get the *parasite* away from here!" One hissed, stomping its foot angrily.

"Leave this forest," another one growled, tail swishing in fright, "before the *creature…"*

There was a wordless cry from something in the woods, and suddenly the centaurs were jostling back and forth skittishly.

The snake of Adrian's was hissing incessantly, loud like rustling wind through branches.

"How *dare you!"* Umbridge screamed, and sent off a stunner which missed.

Then Adrian started *giggling,* a strange crackling noise that sounded wet but almost crazed. Skylar had heard Bellatrix Lestrange laugh, surrounded in a field of blood; it was similar.

"Adrian?" Luna asked quietly but urgently, "Adrian- *Adrian."*

Adrian was giggling, eyes unseeing as he was murmuring something repeatedly.

"Kill it!" One centaur demanded, pointing not at Luna, but at *Adrian.*

What had Adrian *done.*

"We do not attack foals!" One centaur defended, "We do not harm the girl!"

They hadn't said anything about Adrian; Skylar felt very bad about the situation.

The snake hadn't stopped hissing, loud and unbroken in its protective bubble.

The centaurs had said a creature- a creature roaming the woods and they were *terrified* of it and *Adrian.*

"Oh no." Skylar breathed, locking eyes with Luna. They had to have the same idea, especially with how her arms were trembling where they were wrapped around Adrian's shoulders.

Of course.

The snake was hissing.

"Silence the snake!" Skylar shouted, looking at the baffled Umbridge who was *still* looking indignant, "*silence it!"*

"Why you-" Umbridge floundered, and one of the centaurs *bolted.*

"No," Skylar breathed, looking at Hermione quickly, "The monster…"

She clued in, and paled dramatically. Ron gaped, snapping his head around to look at Skylar in horror. Oh shite, Skylar never really clued in that the monster was *real.*

"What? *What."* Umbridge nearly screamed, *"What monster?"*

Adrian twisted, cocking his head like a bird. He turned his upper body quickly, head pointed towards a *very specific* direction in the woods. A breathless crooked grin split his face, looking deranged on his features.

"Hello," Adrian almost crooned, swaying where Luna was supporting him, "You took a while."

Skylar had never been so scared in his life.

(More than the dragon. More than Cedric. More than *him.*)

Umbridge floundered, and the centaurs *bolted.* Skylar hadn't seen something so fast, in a blur of

movement they had vanished.

"Sky?" Ron whispered, voice high pitched as terror leaked into his voice, "You know how you said that this wasn't going to be hard?"

Hermione slunk back, reaching out to grasp both Skylar and Ron's hands in her clammy ones; she was trembling. Skylar squeeze her hand reassuringly, making sure they were there together.

Skylar felt like crying. *'I'm so sorry I dragged you into this, guys.'*

Umbridge clued in that something *very* scary was approaching- she pointed her wand into the dark.

Luna was shaking Adrian slightly, although the boy was still frowning- no, he was *pouting* into the dark woods.

"No." Adrian protested suddenly, causing everyone to jump, "I could have dealt with this."

Umbridge opened her mouth before Adrian *scoffed,* "I *could* have!"

He was talking to himself, but it sounded far too cohesive for it to me another of the strange delusional ramblings. He was talking, in English.

Skylar- Skylar hadn't told his dad and mum that he loved them. The last time he saw them he had shouted at them, over something unimportant. He didn't say goodbye to them.

Luna swallowed and breathed something like a sob. A second, then she composed her expression and looked into the dark, addressing it with a quiet shaking voice, "H-hello. I'm Luna, you must be very beautiful."

The forest was silent, not a single insect scurrying over dead leaves.

Adrian tilted his head back *laughed,* as if he had heard something very funny. His skull thumped against Luna's shoulder, the arms around his waist tightened.

"Mate," Ron whispered, sounding like he was about to cry, "Mate are we going to die?"

Skylar shook his head, unable to comfort his friend.

'I am so sorry.'

Hermione was shaking although she cleared her throat loudly, "A-Adrian, could you introduce us?"

Hermione, Hermione *no.*

Adrian looked at them, looking dazed as if concussed. He squinted, forgetting they were there at all. "I…"

"I wouldn't want to be rude." Hermione hurried, "I-I've never met something so *great."*

There was a low rumble, a snap of something cracking perhaps a hundred feet into the woods. Umbridge paled, her skin looking glassy in the lighting charm. She had just realized that something existed, something unseen watching them in the dark.

Adrian lazily rolled his head back to the dark, then back at Umbridge in a feverish intrigue. "Yeah. You should."

Umbridge had never looked so cowardly before, turning on Adrian in childish fury. "I- stop your *insane ramblings."*

There was a low hiss, eerily similar to the Vipertooth dragon Skylar had faced before. Low, a deep rumble that permeated the air and through trees and through Skylar's entire body.

Adrian giggled, sagging in Luna's arms.

No. Not a dragon- the basilisk. The *basilisk.*

"It's a bit dark," Luna admitted, still draped over Adrian's back, "Could you maybe make it a bit brighter so I could introduce myself properly."

Only Umbridge had a wand, nobody else had any wands.

Adrian looked up Luna with a grin, likely his expression more garish up close. "She-"

There was a low noise, and Adrian cocked his head before nodding. Adrian's eyes clouded, a thin trail of blood exited his nose down until it touched his lip. If not for his frantic breathing and twitching cheek, Skylar would have assumed the other just fell comatose.

The ground around them burst aflame, long tongues of lapping flame as long as Skylar's leg. It was stunning, and exuded nearly uncontained *power.* Far too much, like fiendfyre.

This wasn't the train, this was- this was *much* worse. This was an arena, a growing fence to keep the cattle in.

Hell, this sort of boundary would have kept a bloody Swedish Shortsnout in.

And Adrian was doing it *wandlessly.*

Umbridge squealed and stumbled back, lifting her face as if to protect her from the flames. Instead, they stood tall, lapping around them in a bright circle; trapping them in place.

Nowhere to run, nowhere to go.

Adrian swayed and the thin trail of blood thickened slightly, "No *you're* the stupid one."

"Merlin is he *arguing* with it?" Ron whispered, voice a high pitched wine. Sweat beaded down the redhead's face, anxiety or from the heat.

Skylar felt his jaw shake, his heart racing in his chest. He had to shift this, try and smooth things over. Adrian was the one in control of the situation, Adrian was the one that commanded the monster.

Adrian hated Skylar, he knew that. Skylar could...Skylar could redirect it, draw its attention.

Keep his friends *alive.*

"Hello," Skylar croaked, feeling like there was a rock in his throat, "I'm Skylar. I've heard a lot about you,"

Adrian scowled and looked put out, "Yeah, the one-"

There was a rumble, this one higher and lilting and resonating from all around them. Adrian looked shocked, confused even as his brows furrowed.

"What!" Adrian screamed into the woods, straining against Luna's arms, "Adalonda what are you-"

Adalonda? Was that the monster's name?

Another rumble and Adrian shook his head looking *pissed,* "The- no you-"

Then with a cold sense of dread, Skylar's fears were confirmed when instead of words Adrian's mouth moved and strange almost musical *noises* were exchanged.

Hermione looked- Skylar couldn't describe it.

Umbridge paled, stumbling backwards as she pointed her wand at him in fear, "Parselmouth! Parselmouth you *dark…"*

A larger answering hiss emerged from the dark, and through the illumination of the fire something *giant* emerged.

It was larger than the Vipertooth, and it's skull alone was half the size of a hippogriff. It's snout was scaly and long, a dark greenish sheen with a giant maw twice the size of what anything *should be.*

Umbridge gasped and cursed something incredibly undignified.

The creature, it's eyes were milky as if with cataracts, hissed something with a long flick of its tongue- as long as half of Skylar's body length. It was horrifying, it was beautiful.

Luna inhaled with a small noise, tucking herself even closer to Adrian.

Who...was *arguing.* His face flushed and *furious.*

"- *what do you mean!"* Adrian screamed, breaking out of the hisses with a broken high pitched screech, "You- you *useless reptile."*

The basilisk recoiled, snapping a tree as thick around as Skylar's neck with the bulk supporting its weight. It exhaled heavily in annoyance, he warm air smelled like mold and rot. The basilisk responded and Adrian's jaw tensed and clicked.

"Don't piss it off." Ron whispered, firmly keeping his eyes shut as he whimpered softly, "Don't piss off the giant *man eating snake."*

Skylar couldn't afford to think about the ramifications, he couldn't afford to *think.* He was going to die- or he..he had to find a way to- to get *through this.*

"I- I don't know." Adrian blinked, looking sheepish suddenly, "I didn't think I'd get this- *hey."*

The basilisk's tongue lolled out, nearly kissing the flames as it flickered like Lutain's rapid movements.

Umbridge seemed to gather her movements, pointing her wand and *screaming* a spell that shot out with bright yellow light.

The basilisk flinched but stared at her outright in surprise and almost...*amusement?* The spell impacted, and deflected off to uselessly burn out on the forest floor. Magic repellent scales.

The basilisk hissed something, and Adrian blinked, swaying disoriently.

Adrian giggled, hysterical as the flames suddenly twisted and sputtered like something ill. Adrian turned, looking at Umbridge with something amused. Had the basilisk said a joke? Did snakes even *have* humor?

"Okay, kill her."

(Skylar couldn't breathe.)

Umbridge gasped and stiffened; then she collapsed to the forest floor lifelessly.

Skylar very quickly closed his eyes, crumpling to the floor with his hands fumbling over his face just to be safe. He heard the others drop, Skylar could only bare to imagine that they too were talking cover. There was a silence, before the crunch of leaves as someone walked. Uneven breaking of leaves, of cracking twigs. A rustle of cloth, then Adrian was walking again.

"Here Luna," Adrian spoke, almost bouncing as if all logic or rationality had abandoned him, "Here."

Luna was shaking, taking her wand from Adrian's outstretched hand. Adrian was swaying noticeably, large shifting movements as he casually (so *casually)* reached into Umbridge's rapidly cooling pockets and pulled out the other wands. Lutain dropped to the floor, the spell finally canceling out.

Adrian giggled once more, nodding towards the basilisk, "I *know.* Luna- you'll...you'll *love* Nagini, she's so…"

Luna jaw twitched as tears spilled from the corner of her traumatized eyes, "Oh Adrian."

Adrian giggled, "she- she's okay," Adrian misinterpreted, brandishing one arm dramatically behind him towards the basilisk, "She- she won't do anything unless I tell her!"

Skylar opened his eyes, barely able to breathe through the panic. The dirt and dead leaves were an inch from his face, the air was musty.

Hermione was the first one to carefully crawl over and retrieve her wand, whimpering pitifully as she touched the pink coat.

She crawled back over, passing out both Ron and Skylar's wands.

"He'll be so happy!" Adrian was continuing, trapped as if narrating a fantasy, "You- you'll-"

The black snake was in front of them, Lutain. Skylar held his breath, stiffening entirely as the midnight black serpent stared at him.

It was strangely intelligent, they had already known that. But...something else. Something different- almost a *strange* level of comprehensive understanding was in its gaze.

Supernatural, smart but beyond a normal point.

Help him, it almost seemed to say with its look, *Remus. Help him.*

Skylar didn't understand, he- what was…

Sick. Dying. The snake's tongue flickered out, kissing Skylar's nose, *immortal.*

What- what.

Help him! It urged, and Skylar found himself exhaling in a mere whisper *"Yes."*

The snake moved instantly, shifting to stare at the basilisk and Adrian, opening its mouth to hiss incessantly.

Adrian paused, looking at the snake before hissing back. They were communicating, *talking.*

The basilisk moved, no, it was moving *away.*

Skylar could hardly breathe but he could almost *feel* the moment the oppressive weight of the basilisk's look was off of him. He carefully pushed himself upright, making sure that Luna, Ron, and Hermione were okay before he spared a look at Adrian.

The fire was still burning, throwing strange flickering patterns across Adrian's translucent sickly skin. The scars stood out, darkening like poison in his veins. His eyes were captivated, all attention on the long thin snake he had coiled around his forearm, held close to his face. There was a strange gleam on his face, an obsessive attention he gave the black snake. He reminded Skylar of Moody- the *impostor* Moody the night in the graveyard.

"Is everyone okay?" Skylar asked carefully, trying his best not to look to his right and see the fallen body.

"I'm okay," Luna answered back quietly, holding her wand tightly in one hand as she used the other to push off of the ground.

"Same here," Ron choked back, shaking but putting on a brave face as he helped Hermione up.

Luna struggled to her feet, staying a careful distance from Adrian who was entirely enraptured by whatever the black snake was saying.

Saying. *Talking.* The black snake had *spoke* to Skylar. Obviously not through words, but he couldn't deny that *somehow* it had communicated with him. It was enchanted, something more than he had thought it was.

"The thestrals," Luna breathed, inching backwards as she exchanged glances with Skylar, "I-I can get one and bring them back. To get away."

"Go." Skylar breathed back, "We'll... distract him."

Luna worried her lower lip, "Stun him, I...he isn't in his right mind."

The idea was chilling, but a hand gently clapped Skylar's shoulder. Ron was there, staring at Luna with a grim expression but full of honesty, "We'll take care of him."

Luna gave a small nod, her eyes lingered on the two. She opened her mouth, as if to say something. Her jaw slowly closed, and for the briefest of seconds Skylar could have sworn that she *knew* something.

Skylar opened his mouth to protest- suddenly the idea of Luna running off didn't seem good. It was too late; she sprinted instantly and leapt over the flames.

Her body was illuminated for a brief second, glowing in the dark as the flames licked her skin but never burned her.

Then far too soon she vanished into the dark with an unheard whispering echo of something lost.

Luna departed in the dark.

"I think that magical things used to love you, Adrian. They always were so fond of you, your heart was wild, like they were."

"That's nonsense."

"That you have a wild heart?"

"No, the love thing. You know I don't believe in love, Luna."

"You don't need to believe it. I know that they loved you, Adrian."

"How?"

Luna sprinted through the woods, knowing that the thestrals were hiding in the alcove not that far away. Her mind raced around the single objective; the thestrals the *thestrals.*

Something heavy shifted, scraping against bark and crunching leaves without hesitation. She stumbled to a halt, pausing her heavy breathing to try and isolate the single sound.

Perhaps it was a centaur, if she was lucky it may have been one from the group before. She hadn't interacted with the herd often, although she and they had a mutual respect of one another. If she was even *more* fortunate, it may have been one of the thestrals, attracted to the area from the smell of dead me-

Luna choked and rapidly focused on listening instead of the *corpse.*

A log snapped, far too large for a misplaced hoof.

Oh.

"Hello," She whispered, drawing her wand close to her chest as the crackling grew nearer. She couldn't run, it was almost *certainly* faster.

She knew something that large in the woods, she also knew that it was very very dangerous.

Unheard to her, the great creature responded amused, *"Hello."*

The low hiss confirmed Luna's fears while also lifting the pale hairs on her arms. She stood, tense and alert as she squinted into the impenetrable darkness for the mighty king of serpents.
No- *queen* of serpents; it lacked the large red plume amidst its pointed crest.

Luna licked her lower lip worriedly, "It's...It's a pleasure to meet you. You're very beautiful, I've never seen a creature as mighty."

Adalonda huffed lowly, slowly slithering over a branch and cracking it with her scales; Luna jumped and her head snapped around to peer in the direction of the noise.

"How sweet of you," Adalonda cooed, voice twisting as if made from honey, *"How precious."*

Luna breathed twice, calming her nerves. Very slowly she started walking, Adalonda in turn shifted her body, keeping pace beside her unseen but plenty heard.

"I've learned about basilisks." Luna blurted, "You must be very upset. They're written about very meanly."

Adalonda's eyes blinked leisurely, tasting the air and the surrounding area. *"Oh?"*

"The books say horrid untrue things. They say that basilisks are mean creatures, and out of spite to satisfy their nature,they kill flowers or harmless animals."

Adalonda watched her, an invisible eye that sent prickles down Luna's spine. Never had she felt so terrified in the forest. The basilisk didn't hiss back, so Luna took it as a sign to continue her monologue.

"They say that you're very curious, and very intelligent. I know that the books were right about that, but It's sad how they call you so cruel."

"You're wrong, little one." Adalonda spoke amused, almost laughing.

"I think you're very nice." Luna continued with a breathy voice, ignorant of the rising mirth in the serpent. Her panic thrummed under her skin, pulsing with the rapid beating of her heart.

"I am not; not to humans."

"I'd love to talk to you more, I'm sure you know many things about all sorts." Luna helplessly continued, mentally hoping that something *anything* would emerge from the dark. She knew that roosters were lethal to a basilisk, although conjuring one wouldn't have the same effect and the creature would kill her before she could say the spell. Not to mention that if somehow through sheer dumb luck, the basilisk *did* die, Adrian would *never* forgive her.

"I do, I know things lost to history." Adalonda confirmed wistfully, *"Do you know why I was locked away by Salazar Slytherin?"*

Luna didn't respond, she couldn't have. She carefully climbed over a half rotten log, mindful not to trip.

"I was locked away because you are wrong." Adalonda chided gently, *"I am a cruel creature. Do you know, how long I have slept? Imagining what chaos I could wrought?"*

"When I awoke, what opportunity I had. Do you know what happened after my movements? I brought a war to your pathetic species, I brought disorder spanning longer than your lifetime. But once I had seemingly been of use, I was set asleep once more. Only a month of your time yet It was enough for the one before." her tongue flickered in the air, tickling against the rough bark of the ancient trees *"But I have been awoken once more and as you said, I am so curious."*

"I wondered," Adalonda continued slithering closer to the terrified girl, Luna held her breath sharply, hand shaking around the hilt of her wand.

"I wondered, what seeds I could plant if I remained aware for longer, and so I cradled Cerestes like an undignified worm. The one before him was much smarter, he at least knew how dangerous I was. Cerestes, all but a hatchling, was desperate for affection."

"I wondered what havoc would happen when I diseased Cerestes. It was interesting, but I was so curious, so I tore him apart like I tore the one before him."

"I envenomed his mind and left him haunted, and how I wanted to break him further. I've given him hope, told him he is special. He is a basilisk, but not of his own design. I gave him lies, I let him

take form of a king because I let my breath taint his magic. How proud he was- I wish to see his face when he learns it is all fake. That he was never something strong, or proud, or powerful. Is that so greedy? So gluttonous? I wanted to press him to the edge of madness and corrupt his heart until he was nothing more than a mere rat before my hunger. Do you know child, that he is so fond of you? Death would not break him again, but the unliving would."

Adalonda's body coiled in hidden delight, *"How letting that hatchling starve to death has left him cursed. But you...I never cared for Cerestes. True he is amusing, but for all of the suffering I have struck upon him...I wanted to see what he would do next."*

Adalonda's eyes gleamed and her venom pooled in bloodlust, *"I am a basilisk. I am intelligent, I am cruel and as you said..."*

Adalonda moved her bulk, stopping Luna in her tracks. Luna inhaled sharply as Adalonda brushed near her, the long keratinous crests behind her skull nearly scraped Luna's face as she passed.

"Hello there," Luna spoke, her voice having adopted an uneasy warble. Something cold had sunk into her chest, desperate and longing in a silent scream to *get away!*

Luna swallowed, hyper aware as adrenaline caused by. Adalonda circled slowly, until she had completed a small circle and Luna realized sharply, that she was trapped.

"I- I" Luna stuttered, squeezing her eyes tightly closed before she opened them, hoping it was just a dream.

Adalonda twisted her head, craning to look down at the feeble creature wrapped in her body, reeking of fear and panic.

"I'm worried about Adrian." Luna blurted, her voice higher in pitch as she desperately jumped on anything she could think of, "He- he seems sick. I'm worried that- that he's...He's *dying."* Luna stressed, feeling as if something had grabbed her tightly and squeezed her heart out.

"I know. As you yourself said, I am so, so, curious."

"You had an air around you, when you were younger. You were mean, and sour, but something about you drew them in."

"That's not-"

"You could have tamed wyverns, or calmed manticores. They loved you, and you loved them."

"No, I'm unlovable."

"That's not true."

Luna's scream pierced the air and caused Adrian to move before he realized what was happening.

Adrenaline raced through his veins and inexplicably cleared his mind, pushing past the disorderly blur that were his thoughts. They continued, a low whisper of half spoken words and broken sentences jumbled together in a nonsensical blur.

He moved, legs pumping and burning as the reaching limbs from trees and saplings tore on his cloak. It was eerily familiar in a overwrought way; racing through the forbidden forest with

bloodlust and enemies nipping at his heels.

He could hear others behind him, crashing through undergrowth and along the same trodden path. Paranoia burned coldly, making his eyes blur as they chased and he *ran and ran...*

"Cerestes!" Adalonda called in the dark, like a siren leading him to shore. It pierced through, broken desperate thoughts that clung to the idea of her comforting presence. She sounded puzzled, obligingly polite as if he had asked her to do something she didn't understand.

Adalonda Adalonda Adalonda, something crooned, reaching with clawed fingers and broken knuckles.

"Cerestes?"

Adrian stumbled into the area, hearing her close proximity and the deep throbbing bass of her voice. He could hear the *shlshhlshl* of her scales on the earthen floor, interspersed with the crackling of dead foliage.

"Adalonda!" Adrian screamed, feeling as if his throat would tear from the abuse.

"Why did you strike her?" Adalonda spoke, simultaneously inquiring and lamenting.

Adalonda Adalonda Strike who what Adalonda what I strike what who who who

"What?" Adrian answered, swaying as his words felt underwater, amplified around him as if contained by glass. Adrian could scarcely feel Lutain, coiled roughly around his neck. *"I- I strike- Who? Who did I…?"*

"I don't know why you did, I thought she was your friend, Cerestes?"

Who who who

Adalonda had ceased moving, instead something else drew Adrian's attention. Shifting wobbly and black- Adrian had dismissed it at first as something nonexistent. Something imaginary with the nonsensical ramblings he didn't hear but *heard.*

"I suppose, that she was just a rat anyways."

There was something in the clearing, an actual thing. Wobbly legged and shaking where it stood. It was wet, grotesquely so with something clear and slimy clinging to its legs; reflecting off the lighting charm.

It blinked, nearly falling as it shakily took a step towards him.

It was a thestral. A weak, newborn thestral.

No.

Adalonda strike strike you strike Adalonda you strike Luna[2] *Luna Luna*

"Luna!" He screamed, voice breaking and horrified, *"Luna!"*

He couldn't think- disjointed words repeating over in a haze of confusion. Adalonda wouldn't lie to him, so evidently something had happened somehow he had *struck* and he- he didn't *remember.*

(He didn't understand what was *happening.)*

I struck struck struck

"You struck her. " Adalonda soothed from the edges of his vision, as if reminding him gently of some great tragedy. *"You shifted and sunk your teeth in her until she screamed."*

She was lying she had to be- it..it had to be fake it-

(Adalonda hadn't ever lied to him before. Adalonda had always *helped him.)*

There was someone laying behind the thestral, sprawled on their side with thick black boots sticking out from behind a tree trunk.

Struck struck I struck I struck Luna

Adrian ignored the thestral, walking with a growing sense of dread.

"No." Adrian whispered, winded and pained as something invisible stabbed his heart and *twisted,* "No...no no…"

"It was quite savage, truly. Your venom is strong."

I struck I struck Luna I struck I struck Luna

There were marks in pale skin, long black tendrils spreading from a single thick puncture in her wrist. Her delicate skin painted in red around the mark.

No. No.

Luna no no I struck Luna Luna

He didn't remember it- but everything was shrouded in an unassuming fog. Adalonda had never led him wrong before. Adalonda had never lied to him before.

He killed her

(*'Is it wrong, to do terrible things for someone you care about?')*

The others crashed into the clearing. The horror clarified like a balm; Skylar, Hermione and Ron were chasing him. They were in the forest, they were in the forest and Luna *oh Luna.*

"Adrian?"

Someone was talking to him, distorted and deeper and close and *Luna oh Luna.*

Adrian sunk to his knees, muddied and caked with dead leaves. He reached with one hand, blistered and scarred, towards her pale angelic face. Framed by hair glowing silver in the spell's light. He shakily brushed a strand of hair away from her (*cold cold)* face.

I struck I struck Luna I struck Luna

"Luna." He moaned, gripping her shoulder firmly, "Lun-Luna *wake up."*

Something clear and wet was dribbling from her nose and mouth; like the fluid on the thestral's legs. It was clear like water, thick like honey.

"Luna *wake up."*

He had no memory of it. Merlin, everything in his head was a blurry fog. Shrouded in confusion with gaps larger than castles. Adalonda was firm, she was reassuring. She had helped. She had shattered him.

I struck Luna I struck Luna I struck Luna

(He didn't remember killing her.)

Something rattled in the woods, initially Adrian dismissed it as Adalonda's curious eyes. It took a second for him to distantly recognize that Adalonda had left, giving him privacy. Instead, something clicking and rattling like a box full of bones. Through the trees, many eyes emerged, milky and luminous. Reptilian faces slowly protruded, eyeing the clearing with something like hunger.

"Oh Merlin." Skylar breathed, one hand covering his mouth as Hermione gasped and hid her face in Ron's paling face. They huddled close, flinching at every hoarse agonized scream Adrian let loose. He didn't even seem aware of it.

I struck Luna I struck Luna

The newborn thestral, looking fresh from an absent womb, blinked. It inquisitively peered around and chirped towards the fully mature beasts. They slowly emerged from the woods, weaving between trees silently until exposed to the light.

Adrian glanced over his shoulder, hunkering protectively over Luna as the thestrals granted visit. The largest one he recognized as Mylla, stepped towards the foal. It lowered its ancient skull, brushing scarred muzzle against the wet flank of the baby.

"Basilisk venom." Mylla rattled, a hissing whisper that pierced Adrian's ears as much as he tried to ignore it, *"How painful to go."*

"Luna wake *up!"* Adrian screamed, as if he could wake the dead.

"Sky…" Ron spoke, shaking as the other thestrals, the entire *herd* appeared from between the trees in silent memorial to their newest addition. "Sky what *are* these things?"

Skylar flinched, realizing suddenly that neither Ron or Hermione had ever seen the monsters before. "Thestrals."

Ron gave a small whine in the back of his throat, swinging his head suddenly towards a equine shape on the side.

"They're hideous," Hermione stuttered, "They're *hideous* Sky."

The newborn chirped curiously, looking far too intrigued for standing so close to a corpse.

A corpse.

"Oh, oh *Skylar."* Hermione choked, sounding dearly close to wretching, "It- *Luna."*

Adrian lifted his head up and *screamed.*

"G-give him a moment." Skylar could barely speak, feeling dumb with how quickly everything had gone to *shite.*

The thestrals were clicking their teeth together, peering over at the newborn and slowly introducing

themselves to the young one. Adrian sobbed, a loud broken noise before he tilted his head back and *screamed.*

"Sky…" Ron swallowed, shaking his head and rubbing his hands across his own crying face, "He…"

Skylar sniffled and nodded, pointing his wand carefully at Adrian before whispering, "Stupify."

Adrian stiffened and slumped, falling next to Luna onto the ground. If not for the black poisonous lines across her skin, she looked almost sleeping.

They looked like a pair, the basilisk venom was ironically similar in look to Adrian's scarring across his face. They lay there, matching in misery.

"I- I need to let my dad know." Skylar exhaled, feeling the tears start to fall as he looked away and sent a patronus, struggling more than he ever had in his life.

The thestrals chattered, the newborn stumbled around, its wings see through and as fragile as tissue paper.

"It's kinda fitting." Ron muttered, twitching as he stared at the thestral, "She loved these bloody things."

Hermione stared at him in denial, "She...she isn't- she *can't-"*

Ron numbly pointed to one thestral on the sides, smaller but larger than the newborn by a significant amount, "I think that's Ginny. I can hear it."

'I let her starve to death!'

Skylar leaned over and vomited all over the floor.

"What do you mean that's not true? Luna, I- I've done bad things. Nothing can love me."

"I know that's not true, Adrian."

"How?"

"Promise not to laugh?"

OWL's and NEWT's were canceled when students returned after Easter holidays.

More alarming was the notification that the entire *school year* would end prematurely, due to an alarming incident which brought Albus Dumbledore back to Headmaster position instantly.

The Slytherin's were in bewilderment, instantly assuming and throwing around preposterous ideas what happened. Daphne Greengrass was silent, refusing to speak even when Draco tried his best to coax it out of her. It took only a day until everyone realized the black sheep of Slytherin was gone: Adrian Selwyn had vanished.

At first, everyone assumed he had gotten expelled until Daphne's thin lipped smile was far too grim to explain that.

It took Hermione Granger *snapping* in the library when overhearing a few gossiping students for

the truth to settle around the castle with a heavy fog.

Looney Lovegood, *Luna Lovegood,* was dead.

Skylar Potter was mysteriously gone, and suddenly in the wake of that, Adrian being gone wasn't so odd.

"Merlin," Theo had breathed, looking in Adrian's room with his spare key, "It's all gone."

The entire room had been stripped; everything was blank as if he hadn't existed at all.

Daphne refused to say anything, her younger and unassuming sister was the one to mention anything after a few days of hushed whispers.

"I'd be upset too," Astoria had murmured quietly one day, looking pale and haunted, "If everyone around me kept dying."

That was enough that even Draco was silenced out of sympathy.

Skylar Potter returned after a few days, looking exhausted and well worn. For the first time in Draco's memory, Skylar Potter looked like someone deserving of the 'Golden Boy' title.

He seemed grim, determined, and far far too quiet for how he used to be.

"Does any of this make you worried?" Theo asked with hushed voices, looking between Millicent, Daphne, Draco, and Blaise, "Do you- do you even *remember* what Adrian Selwyn used to be like? Bloody hell, he used to be our *friend."*

Daphne was silent, and Draco felt far too much guilt to ever justify speaking.

"All of you," Theo's nostrils flared in his anger, "*You* kept pushing him," Theo pointed at Blaise accusatory, "and *you* kept attacking him," he pointed at Millicent, "and *you* never let him breathe for *one bloody moment."* he pointed at Draco before he rounded on Daphne with wordless fury. "And..and you wouldn't *let him be."*

Theo looked somewhere past furious, and just looked *tired,* "I am so bloody *pissed* at *all of you."*

Theo stormed out, and once again, Slytherin was quiet.

"Have I ever laughed at you before, Luna?"

"Well, no. You haven't."

"I promise I won't laugh. Tell me?"

"Once more, we are here to celebrate the end of an eventful year. Although I have been absent for most of it, I was...called in, for sake of unity. It is tradition, to close our last feast with words of enthusiasm and encouragement for the next term, yet in wake of situations I'm certain you all know, I find that it would be disgraceful and unimaginable to simply ignore the events of recent times."

"It has appeared, in the most horrific fashion, somewhat of a new tradition at Hogwarts, to have someone dear to our hearts depart unexpectedly. Ginevra Weasley, passed away from our ranks a mere three years ago. Cedric Diggory passed away from our ranks last year. Days ago, in my

unfortunate absence due to the Ministry of Magic's intervention in our humble school, the temporary Headmistress Dolores Umbridge was found murdered in our woods along with our dearly missed Luna Lovegood."

"In wake of these incidents and the growing powers that threaten our security, I have put forth the mandatory steps for an abrupt and indefinite closure of our wonderful school."

"However, the Ministry of Magic has determined that the most recent fatalities were due to *poor administration,* and have stated that they choose to deny all claims that dark forces have gathered once more."

"I believe that it would be a *joke,* to blindly follow such propaganda and not inform my students and my friends of such a danger."

"I believe that it would be an inexcusable error to *ignore* that students have *died*, and the threat still exists to threaten the safety of you, my students. I cannot excuse placing you all in peril, not as your Headmaster but as person who is concerned not in politics or publicity but as someone concerned in the *right* thing to do."

"Against my will, the Ministry of Magic has denied my request for the closure of this school based on insufficient information or concern. Despite my efforts, the Ministry will *not* permit this. They do not want you to know or equally feel my concern, and as such they decide to keep you in the dark and not inform you of the situation. Based on our lack of intervention, our lack of *action* by our governing body, four students are forever silent except for words carved into their tombstones."

"I am here to inform you all, that I am suggesting you do not return to our school if you fear for your lives. If you believe that your family situation will deny you this request, then I will personally aid you to inform your guardians of this danger. I have closed the registration for new students to join our ranks; either this threat has been dealt with accordingly or in six years our halls will be empty but mentionably, safe."

"Notwithstanding, I know that certain students will take this warning as a challenge, and return with bright eyes and determination next Fall. Those that decide to once more return, I welcome you all with open arms, but do not make a decision hastily."

"In this hall, I wish to give you all a somber goodbye, and to remind you the many names and faces, and *voices* that are quiet now, and forever will be."

Dumbledore reached down with a wrinkled hand, raising a single goblet in a smooth movement. He held it aloft, glittering like a lighthouse to guide the way.

"To Ginny Weasley," He announced quietly, resonating the word echoed around the hall.

Two students raised goblets- Fred and George Weasley holding goblets aloft to the sky with blank expressions more unsettling than Dumbledore's words. As if a cue, Ron Weasley grabbed his cup, holding it up in a silent toast.

Gryffindor house joined in, select students holding cups with bated breaths.

"To Cedric Diggory," Dumbledore spoke, and this time a black haired student from Ravenclaw thrust her cup upwards with an expression of anger.

Others followed, the house Hufflepuff with select older students from other houses."

"To Suzie Forestar." Dumbledore announced, this time his eyes shifting to the Slytherin table were sure enough, glasses were lifting quietly into the air.

"To Luna Lovegood."

Ravenclaws lifted their glasses, eyes downcast hiding shame. Skylar Potter lifted his goblet, quiet and burning with *anger.*

"To *all of those* who we will *not* let fade to the dark, and who we, along with their memories, will burn bright. Dark times lie ahead of us and there will be a time when we must choose between what is easy, and what is *right.*"

"Well...you see…"

"What is it Luna?"

"You're not unlovable, silly. Because I love you."

End of Part Two

Quarantine

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian is alone, mourning, and Lutain has found a new child to bother.

Chapter Notes

Thank you everyone for the amazing reviews!
Here marks the start of Part 3. I know it's shorter, but I'm working frantically to try and add length to chapters. I wanted to get this one out instead of procrastinating and never getting it out.
Anyways, let me know story suggestions for things you'd like to see. I'm actually far behind on my writing, and so any suggestions or ideas will likely be considered for the story itself.
Thank you all again for the amazing reception you've all provided me.
Enjoy!

'Let her starve to death.'

"I used birds as target practice. Little bluebirds, or finches. They were always quick, but so naive and innocent. It took me years to find them beautiful in their own right; a marvel that a living breathing creature could *fly.* Amazing to think about, of course we have dragons and hippogriffs and Pegasus even but...I don't know. I think birds with how simple they are, are miracles."

Sirius Black sighed through his nose quietly, leaning back on his chair as he crossed his arms over his chest. "Have you considered writing a book?"

Adrian glanced at him dryly, knees curled to his chest with his arms wrapped protectively around them. His cot squeaked slightly, metal grinding as he shifted his weight.

"I don't think anyone would care to see what I have to say." he dismissed casually, turning his head back to stare at the single blank corner in the room; Adrian tended to stare at the single corner often.

"I'm sure someone would." Sirius tiredly assured. "Everyone has a unique opinion, and I think your perspective would be rather interesting, you know, considering you commanded a basilisk to murder someone without blinking and...and *oh yes,* can speak to snakes."

Adrian didn't rise to the bait, Sirius felt glum about that.

It was more interesting when the boy had arrived, the first time Sirius had met him and seen the scars- bright red and fresh on his skin.

Adrian had changed a lot, in so many ways Sirius couldn't label them all. He was more volatile in a

way too different to only be dark magic addiction.

Although he was dangerous, it was certainly more exciting with Adrian at the headquarters.

But here...here in witness protection (as they had so awkwardly phrased it), Adrian was...Sirius didn't know how to describe it.

Now the boy just made Sirius sad. Something in Adrian's unpredictability had settled, and now Adrian was just...quiet.

(Sirius preferred the once snarky boy, he appreciated and admired the volatile snappishness. He didn't like this, it reminded Sirius too much of his late brother.)

Adrian didn't say anything, he stared at the corner.

"You know," Sirius began dolefully, "I used to walk around big cities in my Animagus form a lot. People always treat you differently, and it's interesting to see how people *really* are. I met this dog, the sweetest dog in the world. It would bring me food- not that I ate dumpster trash but the dog always shared with me. It didn't wag its tail much, and it always looked a bit worried."

Adrian didn't look like he was responding to Sirius' words, but the man wasn't concerned. He continued quietly, "Whenever anyone moved quick it would flinch. It would always run when someone walked towards it, but it was the nicest dog to me. It was so damn *terrified* of humans, and because of that strangers thought it was vicious. All it wanted was to be left alone, and one day a muggle animal control came and took it away. I apparated to that muggle pound, wanting to see where that poor dog went. They had put it down, *'too vicious for public safety'* or something like that."

Sirius stretched quietly, his joints straining silently and cracking mutedly. Adrian still hadn't looked over.

"What I want to know, is if you view us like that pound. Are you just waiting for us to put you out of your misery? Because from my point of view, we're only trying to help you."

Adrian had a wry smile, subtle and small and looking somewhat pained. The edges of his face were fraying away, and Sirius was afraid of what would be left when it broke completely.

"That was a shite story." Adrian sighed, sounding weary. "That sounded so fake, and poorly done it gave me heartburn."

There was the snark, generally absent and only flaring on rare occasions. Sirius smiled, a small twitch of his lips, "maybe it was."

"You should put more effort into it, it was bloody terrible."

"I don't see you trying!"

Adrian huffed and almost instantaneously the energy drained from him. Adrian shook his head slightly, as if forcibly removing any competitive nature he had left.

"Come on kid, you can't be that exhausted yet."

"The repetitive process of breaking, attempting to fix yourself, and falling apart when you realize you never *were fixed* is very exhausting, Black."

Adrian glanced at him, turning his head ever so slightly. The light made his pale skin seem sickly, his eyes almost glazed. "At this point in time, I wouldn't argue if you *were* here to put me out. Wasn't that the point of your story? I'm the dog."

"That's not what we do."

"And who is *we,* because I'm surer than you are that Albus Dumbledore has killed more people-"

"Only people that deserve it," Sirius snapped back, reflexively. Almost instantaneously he felt revolted with himself; he knew better than to indulge the warped mindset Adrian seemed to express more now than ever before. Only light banter, only the shallow gentle topics Sirius had been told. James often was Sirius' only sanity with how to interact with the kid.

(The one-time Adrian had seen James, they had been forced to stun the kid. That, or risk James losing an eye or *worse*.)

Adrian's face tilted slightly into a small scathing grin, directed at the single wall and nothing further. "Sirius, who do you think deserve death?"

Sirius said nothing, he knew that he couldn't ever answer that.

"I presume you'd say, terrible people...killers?" Adrian mused, eyebrows lifting as if he himself were brainstorming something casual. "No, not that simple...dark wizards and witches? But then how would you classify them as *dark*- people who owned a dark artifact? No, that's too broad...how about…"

The lilting up and down tone, the playful twist of it was driving Sirius furious, "this isn't a *joke*, Selwyn."

Adrian snapped his head around, staring at Sirius coldly and blankly. There was no warmth left in his face, there was no pleased smirk at instigating a response. "You're the one not dignifying me with a response, Black."

Sirius swallowed thickly, his throat feeling sore with how sharp he was breathing. "O-okay, well. There's laws against it, murder."

Adrian's eyes shifted with something, sparking with some sort of energy that directed the boy's attention to then and now. "I'm listening."

"The Ministry doesn't allow killing people," Sirius started, feeling more comfortable now that he had backing behind his idea, "they say in auror training that you can't kill your target."

"You do," Adrian bluntly countered. "Murder in hunting targeted peoples are permitted in cases where crimes are punishable by the Dementor's kiss."

Sirius flinched, shaking his head, "that's defense. Those people are dangerous- even the worst on this planet don't deserve murder. It's cruel."

"It isn't." Adrian leaned backwards, tilting his head to rest against the wall with his eyes closed. He was becoming bored with the discussion. "Various curses are actually quite peaceful, more effective than a Dementor's kiss."

"It wouldn't ever stop people from doing those crimes- it...you aren't punishing the-"

"You don't consider the loss of your own life, a punishment in itself?

"That isn't what I'm trying to say!" Sirius snapped out, hands clenched into fists. His fingernails dug into the meat of his palm, painful crescents.

"You're trying to argue why murder is never alright." Adrian murmured lowly, "and yet, your side in this war murders people every week."

"That's different." Sirius defended, feeling attacked on a personal level.

"Why?" Adrian asked, voice low as if he was no longer talking to Sirius himself, "because they *deserved* it? Because they were far too evil to live? Because they were a... a hazard to others? Black, why do you think Skylar stunned me, strapped me to the back of a thestral and sent me to your clutches?"

"Skylar did what he had to, to keep other students safe."

"Do you feel safe now, Black?"

Sirius didn't have anything to say about that.

(Selwyn would leave him feeling sickened more often than not.)

Adrian Selwyn slept *a lot.*

Sirius had heard about it from Snape's loud complaining, apparently the kid slept so much he used to skip classes and not do homework. But what Sirius considered 'a lot' was drastically underwhelming once he was facing Adrian's intense sixteen hours of sleep a day. Sixteen, every night.

Merlin, how had the child even had *decent grades?*

Adrian didn't seem exhausted enough to *need* that amount of sleep, he just...didn't get out of bed. It looked to Sirius like he didn't bother climbing out of the cot unless food had arrived, in which case he scarfed down an unhealthy amount in a short period of time.

Sometimes he'd relocate to different corners of the room, bundling his blanket around him in a light grey cocoon. It didn't look comfortable, the one-time Sirius asked about it Adrian only ended up laughing in a haunting self-deprecating way.

Adrian was like a violent caterpillar, sleeping and eating and sleeping once more.

Adrian was also incredibly chatty, and so far, hadn't failed to talk once. It was mostly about irrelevant things, or dismissive comments that were nonetheless, conversation.

(On the rare occasion, Adrian would muse about abstract concepts, morality and philosophy with such an innate and advanced level of self-reflection, it scared Sirius sometimes.)

(What scared Sirius even more, were the rare moments when Adrian would smile softly and gaze at a wall without seeing.)

"What's your favorite color?" Sirius offered, taking a seat in what had quickly become, his chair.

Adrian was sitting cross legged this time, looking underwhelmingly plain in the light grey clothing they had given him. It was like prison garments much to Sirius' dismay, but James had stressed multiple times that it was only so they could tell quickly if Adrian somehow injured himself.

"I don't have one." Adrian deadpanned, voice dull and lifeless.

"Really? Not even your noble green? I thought you Slytherin's had house pride."

"Silver."

Sirius nearly did a double take. "Pardon?"

"You asked about my favorite color," Adrian sighed, fiddling with the fraying corner of his blanket, "I like silver."

"A bit gaudy," Sirius blinked in surprise, "Never thought you'd fancy that, though I reckon gold is a bit Gryffindor, isn't it? Silver was Ravenclaw though- ah, I guess it is pretty by itself. Not a bad choice."

Adrian fiddled with the blanket further, looking ready to tear it beneath his clipped fingernails.

Sirius nodded slowly, adjusting the topic. "Ah, what's your favorite magical creature then?"

Adrian blinked slowly, an owlish movement that seemed out of place of his once sharp expression, "I don't know."

"You- you don't know?" Sirius balked, "I thought you would have liked thestrals with how much you apparently hung out around them."

Adrian flinched away as if struck, gazing at the wall blankly.

'Shite' Sirius thought quickly, trying to understand what could have set him off this time.

Sirius struggled to think of *how* he messed up, he didn't *think* that was a bad topi-

"Oh." Sirius very smartly blurted.

Adrian twitched, and hid his face further.

That whole situation was still a mystery, although one that everyone doubted they'd ever solve. Skylar had given them a rather detailed summary of what had happened, and given how *devastated* Adrian was days after the incident, they had concluded that he hadn't been involved with the girl's death. It was still a mystery as to *how* she died- especially since that twice damned monster was under Adrian's control.

(Why Adrian had been so delirious that night was *also* another mystery Sirius didn't think they'd solve. They had tested him for illicit potions or injected powders, they hadn't found anything.)

The thestrals though...Hagrid had given word that he'd be monitoring the mysterious new foal. Either out of guilt or a sense of duty, Sirius wasn't going to ask.

"Yeah, *oh."* Adrian snapped, the unpredictable temper rising once more. It was impossible to track, and now a constant hazard of interacting with the boy.

"I- I'm sorry kid. I'll ah, how about a different topic?" Sirius tried pathetically.

Adrian gave a bark of brittle laughter that was akin to ice cracking.

"What topic?" Adrian asked, his voice fragile and furious but with no target, "What could we *possibly* talk about?"

Sirius's mouth felt dry, "Ah, any topic that interests you?"

Adrian laughed, a high-pitched grieving noise, "You know what the sad reality is with that, *Black?* The sad truth is I can't think of one thing that will make me happy anymore! There's absolutely *nothing now!"*

"Hey, don't talk like that-"

"What do you *want me to say?* Why can't you just- why can't you just bloody call the ministry already and *kill me?"*

Sirius left the room shaken; he closed the door on the loud noises that was neither laughter or sobbing but something in between.

"Maybe talking about her will make it easier to-"

"She's gone and will never come back and I have to keep living like this, Black."

"Merlin, a bit dramati-"

"Leave me alone."

"Why are you so chatty? You used to never say anything to us."

"I'm lonely."

"What- lonely? You never chatted with any of us before."

"I had Lutain. I had Lu-"

"Maybe I should give it a shot?" James asked, brows scrunching together as they peered through the one-way window on the door. Adrian had made it off his cot, instead he was now hunched in the corner, countless plates of food reduced to crumbs. Lily could count the vertebrae on his back through his shirt.

"The last time you went in there he screamed at you and tried to gut you." Sirius sighed, rubbing his eyes with the palm of his right hand, "We need Moony to come back from Germany."

"We can't contact him until he gets in touch with the packs over there." Lily soothed, looking heartbroken towards the door, "I don't think Remus even heard the news."

Lily looked through the window again, chewing on her lower lip nervously, "Do you think we should give him more food? I have that pie that Molly made yesterday."

"He's ate *four times* the normal amount, Lil. Any more and his stomach will burst." James grimaced, looking just as worried. "He- shite Sirius he hasn't even *showered.*"

"They already did a dozen tests on him, they can't find anything wrong with him. No disease and his body's working fine. Even Albus can't figure it out." Sirius admitted sourly, feeling like it was a personal slight. He felt like it was his own failing, as if he had done something wrong. "I don't know what to do, mate."

"You're trying, Padfoot. That's all we can ask." James smiled, although the shadows under his eyes

made it hard to take genuine. "I feel terrible over this. He's just a *kid."*

"A kid who apparently knows his philosophical arguments. How's Sky?"

Lily and James looked just as somber, "He's doing...better than expecting. They're with Molly right now, I don't know how long we can shelter them. Skylar especially, he...he's more determined than ever."

"That bloody prophecy." Sirius cursed sourly, with a pain of exhaustion. "He's still trying to sneak out?"

Lily shook her head, "No, not since the first time. He's absolutely taken with that s-"

Sirius cut her off quickly, shaking his head and jerking his thumb towards the door. Lily froze before she nodded sadly. They still hadn't determined just how far Adrian could hear, how heightened his senses were along with how controlled his accidental magic.

"Can I bring him anything?" Lily asked, looking on the verge of tears, "there has to be *something.*"

"When is Albus coming by?" James murmured quietly, very aware of Adrian, despite the wards.

"Whenever he's back from wherever he was going. The- that cave thing. He thinks he found something very important." Sirius muttered back, shifting on his feet, "I hope soon. I don't think Selwyn is getting any better."

Lily looked alarmed, "You- you think that he's getting sick?"

"Sky mentioned that Adrian was sick from something, I think he's just getting *worse."*

"Sirius?"

"Yeah kid?"

"Where-" *Where did they take her body. Where can I see her again?*

"Adrian?"

"Never mind." *Where are you, Luna?*

"Have you ever tried knitting?" Sirius awkwardly asked.

Adrian scoffed quietly, curled small in a ball on his cot. Lily had brought a softer blanket, baby blue. "You'd give me needles?"

Yeah no, maybe not knitting.

"What about ah, drawing. Arts and crafts and all. You seem like an artsy person."

Adrian shrugged his shoulders, fiddling with the light blue blanket, "I've never tried. Outside of classes I mean. I drew a decent Bowtruckle."

Sirius shifted on his chair, "Yeah I never was one for drawing. What about reading? I thought Lily brought some books on herbology a few days ago?"

Adrian was stiff with his movements, trying not to show how unsettled he was by the prospect. "I don't- not much of a reader."

Sirius raised his eyebrows in shock, "Wait really?"

"It's- It's difficult. To focus."

Sirius licked his lips, shifting once more on his chair. He wished he had something to fiddle with, "That doesn't sound good. Recently?"

Adrian's mouth opened before he closed it wordlessly. He didn't answer and didn't look like he was going to at all.

Sirius tried a new approach, "Well, I mean I'm in here all day so I don't mind chatting about whatever. It must get lonely in here."

Adrian gave a quiet bark of sardonic laughter, "It doesn't anymore."

Sirius frowned and leant forward, "What do you mean?"

Adrian tilted his head back, looking dreadfully blank but somehow wickedly amused, the acidic green and yellow eyes were unnerving to Sirius, "I have plenty of voices to listen to."

Sirius felt a chill run down his spine, "You hear voices?"

'I deserve it, don't I? It's all my fault, isn't it?'

Adrian's delight slowly faded into something crippled. He hunched lower, tilting his body away from Sirius, "I want to be alone now."

Sirius opened his mouth to argue, before he closed it with a sigh and stood. His chair squeaked on the floor, and the door closed a bit louder than he meant to.

The idea that Adrian was hearing *voices* wasn't good. The idea of hearing things that weren't there always accompanied madness. Bellatrix Lestrange was the best example of that.

Sirius had thought that Adrian's belongings had been dropped off as well, likely stored in a broom cupboard somewhere. Adrian was meticulous, or Sirius remembered Adrian being meticulous way back before whatever horrific event had transpired and warped him this much. Hell, Sirius had grudgingly *liked* the kid; he had a breathless exuberance when he was dive bombing Mundungus with that gyrfalcon of his, or when explaining the properties of some strange magical monster.

There had to be *something* in his personal artifacts. Of course, he and Prongs had scoured through everything once, just to make sure that they weren't smuggling in a magical artifact. They went so far as to remove Adrian's wand from the *building,* it was currently in Tonk's possession (who had let it slip that Remus would be visiting her first).

Of course, there weren't *that* many cupboards in the little cottage Sirius had holed himself up at.

He and James had come to the same decision that keeping Adrian in the Order headquarters was too big a risk, especially since they didn't have all the relevant information yet as to how dangerous the boy was. With Remus and Albus gone on missions, they had quickly jumped on one of the Black's distant cottages, fit with enough rooms to transform one into a quiet panic room. A few well-placed charms (courtesy of Lily, the charm *champion)* and they had a glorified prison cell until they could have Albus take a look.

Adrian's gyrfalcon had been sent away and was currently in the care of Hermione, the snake sent away similarly. It wouldn't do to have a snake around a parselmouth, and the cottage was off in Ireland so there wasn't any wildlife that Adrian could interact with if he *did* manage to escape.

Adrian Selwyn was Sirius' prisoner, no matter how cushy he tried to make it.

And now his prisoner was *hearing voices.*

"Merlin, I shouldn't have quit being an auror." Sirius bemoaned, searching yet another cupboard for the massive trunk and other belongings of Selwyn. It felt odd to talk out loud with nobody nearby, so he refrained from it.

He eventually *did* find the trunk, and after a few seconds of lugging the behemoth out into the hallway, he popped the lid open and peered inside. It was magically expanded of course, mostly to accommodate the large stack of textbooks and other oddities. The kid had a *complete set* of combat potions; he and James' had many of the same ones in case of injury on the job.

Not only that, he had hoarded a strange assortment of magical artifacts that weren't dangerous but certainly weren't common. Hides and horns, claws and other strange bits. Letter openers that hadn't ever been used but looked interesting. A few of the things Sirius recognized from his old house, when Remus had combed through Adrian's collection allowing a portion to reside with the younger boy. Nothing looked malicious or evil, in fact it was all rather innocent.

(A part of Sirius had hoped that he would find something incriminating, at least then they knew what they were *dealing with.*)

Sirius had been sorting through all the books for an hour, flipping through cover to cover in case any pages were hollowed. Instead, it seemed Selwyn had a hobby of writing in the margins, correcting information on magical creatures wherever it was applicable. It was endearing, something snarky which made Sirius smile.

(Adrian had written more than a dozen snarky comments in a potion book, likely ignoring Snape in favor of doodling.)

Sirius came across a leather-bound journal, high quality too. Flipping through at first Sirius thought it was an antique business ledger, or stolen from a store in Hogsmeade. It took a closer examination and a few names for it to clue in that it was *Adrian's business ledger.*

Sirius had *heard* that Adrian had been dealing potions or other illegal objects to underage students. Merlin knows he and James both had smuggled enough firewhiskey into Hogwarts to get expelled, but the details in the book were excruciating.

It had dates, names, *precise details* on what was exchanged, and then listed if the debt was ever repaid. It was- it was an *empire.* An entire *system* to keep him in safety- bloody hell the boy had deals with *seventh years.*

"Merlin's beard." Sirius gaped, flipping through the high-quality parchment to see even more tiny print, more and more details in tiny writing that wasn't magical at all. Every little letter was done painstakingly by hand; hours and *hours* of work turned to rubbish.

But...if Adrian was *this* meticulous he wouldn't have just...*stopped.*

Sirius had never leapt on the journaling train, but he knew first hand from Lily that once you start journaling or writing, it's very tricky to stop. Old habits die hard after all.

Sirius leapt into the trunk once more, hypothetical tail wagging in his search.

Now he knew what to look for. Anything bound by soft leather, nothing made of cardstock or other woody materials. There were a few other leather books, but most were just for notes taken in classes. All of them were old, the detail and ambition dried up towards the later part of his Hogwarts years.

(It hurt to think about; it pained Sirius to imagine Adrian withdrawing more and more, until even the thought of writing exhausted him. Something he loved turned to bitter ash, as white as Adrian's skin.)

Sirius found something- a leather bound book but rather shoddy quality. He couldn't even imagine Selwyn using something that looked like it came from a second-hand store and felt like swede.

Mostly to entertain the thought, Sirius undid the loose binding and flicked through a few pages.

He nearly dropped it when he spotted handwriting- not *too much*, but used.

"What the…" Sirius mumbled to himself, flipping to the first page where it was dated on the top corner. It was…. the date was...a long while back actually. Selwyn's fourth year, just before the third task for Skylar.

Sirius traced his finger under the writing, the font unusually neat and tidy on the paper; the ink had smudged slightly from the cheap quality paper.

"It was one of the most disgusting things I've ever experienced. Adalonda says it was blood. Whatever it was, good thing it came in a black bottle. I'd have lost my nerve if I had to see it."

That was it.

That was *it.*

"What." Sirius balked, confused beyond words.

He flipped to the next page, peering at the words with morbid curiosity, *'Rancid. Painful for days afterwards, headache and sensitivity to light.;*

Sirius frowned, none of this was making any sense. Was this some sort of- some sort of log? What for?

The next page held only slightly more detail, just a little bit more on the type of headache or where it was located. Abdominal cramps and pain, then diaphragm pains. Sounded more like a bad bout of food poisoning.

They continued, slowly starting to branch outwards as the date went longer. The first log that *wasn't* about status but instead was more of a journal was…. almost exactly a year ago.

'It's strange. It's like there is a small gap, a pause between my brain and body. A second where I don't move, although I'm stepping forward. I'm treading through water that nobody can see.'

"What in the blazes?" Sirius asked himself in alarm, already flipping rapidly to the next page which cryptically didn't give any more detail but resonating a similar thought.

The dates slowly began to be longer, distant apart until Sirius recalled that it was right around when Adrian was being held at headquarters. When they were cleaning up all the rooms and

keeping Adrian slightly apart due to his volatile nature.

'I have potions. I'm not sure why. They go down cold, and I can feel them sit heavy. Remus says that he can smell something wrong with me. Nobody else seems to be sure, or they can't tell. I'm starting to think that he's right.'

Sirius had a very very bad feeling about it.

He turned the page, alarmed when there wasn't an entry until the date before everyone had left for next term.

'Sometimes I feel like there's nothing. Inside my body, where my lungs and stomach are. Just an empty cavern where potions go and slosh around. And I'm always so hungry.'

Hungry.

Since last *year.*

Sirius shakily stumbled to his feet, nearly tripping over the mess of textbooks he left scattered throughout the hallway. If the way the book was progressing was accurate, the next entry would be *after* the train incident. The famous incident here Adrian had seemingly accidentally set an entire *compartment on fire.*

'I didn't mean to. I think that's the worst bit. I honestly didn't mean for that to happen, it's like trying to keep sand from falling between your fingers. It's too much, it's always too much. The worst bit, the worst bit is that I know nobody believes that either.'

Sirius desperately flipped through the pages; they didn't get any better.

'I'm confused. I don't know what's going on, I feel antsy and on edge. Like I need to shed my skin, like It doesn't fit me right anymore. But instead of growing larger, I feel like I'm shriveling inwards.'

'I can figure this out on my own. I know I can. I wanted to be useful, well, now I am. Now I'm useful- and, and now I'm second guessing it? This is what I wanted.'

'I know I'm stronger. I can see it, I can feel it. There's proof, there's so much proof and somehow...I don't know. I don't feel stronger. I feel terrible.'

'I can cast anything, I know I can. I mean, I mean I can. I'm not struggling in classes, I mean I can do the spellwork. I can do it. I can cast anything. I can do it.'

'I can appar- I can do magic. I have...I've done magic that's advanced. Very advanced. I'm strong, I- I know I'm strong. I can- Moody said this was going to make me useful. I'm useful. I'm useful.'

Moody. It said *Moody.*

But- this was during the fifth year, the dates started in fourth so this- this was the *impostor.* This was for *Barty Crouch Jr.*

This was not good. This was very very not good.

Sirius felt nauseous, and very slowly slid his thumb in on the most recent, and last entry. It would have been the one night before the- before the one girl had-

Sirius turned the pages, staring at the page a few moments to try and comprehend the chaotic

disjointed writing on the page, nothing like the careful font from before.

"No, no." Sirius shook his head, turning pages back just to make sure he hadn't skipped anything. It wasn't any better.

'I'll KILL YOU I;LL KILL you.'

'Illkill you crouch I'll KILL YOU,'

'Idon't I dont what did youdoto me CrOUch.'

This looked bad. This looked horrendous in any way he looked at it. They were without question, Adrian's handwriting. He had written diligently over the course of a year, maybe even further. It was personal obviously, originally some sort of...of *log,* but towards the end perhaps Adrian had somehow forgotten its original purpose.

The log reminded Sirius of old historical records of magical experiments, before they had found a safer way to test. The implications- that Adrian would for some reason be *tracking* something not well known.

And Crouch- or rather the impostor. Somehow Adrian had been in contact with the impostor, somehow this was… (no, Sirius wasn't positive, he didn't have enough evidence) ...this *could* have been due to the man. This was bad, this meant that whatever ailment Adrian had likely was purposeful.

(It also proved that there *was* something wrong with the boy.)

He needed to get in contact with Dumbledore *now.*

Skylar Potter had the weight of the world on his shoulders, and then some.

In this instance, the 'then some' was a gigantic snake which had *no respect for personal boundaries.*

"Seriously, stop squirming!" Skylar hissed under his breath, using the flat palm of his hand to gently push the inquiring black head further down under the collar of his cloak.

The snake squirmed a few more seconds as if to spite him before going docile. It was creepy how intelligent the thing was.

Skylar rushed out of the room he was sharing, peering down the stairwell to where Mrs. Weasley had been calling for him.

"I'm here!" He shouted down, smiling strained as she looked relieved.

"Oh, good heavens, *there* you are." Molly sighed, wiping a pot dry with a worn dishtowel, "the twins have been asking me all day about you!"

Skylar gave a single wave down the stairs, "Sorry! I'll be down in a few seconds!"

He spun around back into his room, closing the door and making sure it was shut before he pulled the snake off his neck. It moved obligingly, slithering nearly silently until it somehow maneuvered onto the bed, staring at him blankly.

"Okay okay *fine."* Skylar sighed, leaning against the door exhaustively, "Look, I know I told you

I'd *help* but the thing is I don't know *how."*

The snake's tongue flickered in the air twice.

"And I don't speak snake!" Skylar hissed in a loud whisper, "I don't know what you're saying!"

Its tail thrashed twice. It gave the impression of being distinctly ticked.

"Okay, okay look." Skylar sighed, running his hands through his hair causing it to stand upright, "He- Adrian is with Sirius at one of the Black Cottages but I don't know the exact location. I think they're trying to help with- with ah, his head."

Lutain the snake paused, before very clearly *nodded.*

Skylar took a step back and slammed himself into the doorknob accidentally, he hissed and nearly crumbled to the floor.

"Merlin," he wheezed, closing his eyes briefly as his right kidney recovered, "Okay, okay *okay.* So, you're *really smart.*"

The snake's tongue flickered in the air, a bland movement that somehow conveyed much more when Skylar knew that it was intelligence.

"I…" Skylar's mouth felt dry as he thought quickly, "He- you ah, you talked to him a lot. Didn't you? Like, you were- you were Adrian's best friend. He must have told you everything."

The snake paused, its body expanding and contracting with its breaths.

"He- do you know who Luna is- *was."* Skylar painfully corrected, flinching at his slip, "She, ah, she looked-"

The snake cut him off with a nod. Right, it was intelligent.

"She told me that she was ah, worried over Adrian. That he was sick, or something was seriously wrong with him. Do you have any idea what it could be?"

The snake suddenly seemed much more alert, rising and undulating as it struggled to convey something.

A flash, a *burn* and Skylar flinched away with a hiss. He pressed one hand against his eyes, warning off the sting of an impending migraine. The snake's mouth opened, a low hiss that...that didn't sound like a hiss. It started, but somewhere along the way it shifted slightly into a more echoing noise, like a geyser or a slew of water.

Skylar flinched and opened his eyes, looking at the snake as his head *hurt,* "what- what are you…"

"The knife…" Something- something was talking. Around him, through him, *in Skylar's head.* It wasn't the snake, it wasn't the strange whispers and emotions that Skylar could barely scrape together. This one... the 'voice' was different. This one was almost feminine, grumbling and raspy like what he imagined an ancient witch would sound like. Deep, with strong bass and an accent Skylar couldn't place.

"The knife, Cerestes."

What- no, *who* was talking. Somehow without a doubt, it was the snake's doing- the indescribable hiss of escaping gas was unmistakable. The snake was frozen with its jaws unhinged like a statue.

Like a magical artifact speaking someone else's voice directly into Skylar's brain.

Then, Skylar collapsed to the ground, hands pressed over his ears as he heard a gut-wrenching *scream*. The noise was horrible; loud and piercing and full of unfiltered *pain.*

"Stop it!" Skylar shouted, he could barely hear his own voice over the animalistic screaming. It was...it was how he imagined it sounded to be burned alive. Terror, agony, it rang loud enough his *eyes hurt.*

"Give it to Lutain." The voice, the strange feminine voice.

What was- he...Skylar couldn't *understand…*

"Lutain." a single hoarse voice whispered out, torn and ruined. Destroyed from screaming, vocal cord snapped and withered and welded together anew. The snake's name was broken with a wet sob, a small pause before it began anew.

The voice gurgled, a rancid vomiting noise followed with pain filled whimpers of something dying.

Lutain snake stopped hissing, and its jaws finally snapped shut with an audible *snap.*

Skylar felt numb, unable to think.

The room was dead silent. There hadn't been a single noise in it all along.

What Skylar had heard- it was *in his head.*

(Rattling and screaming and *burning and burning*-)

"What…" Skylar whispered, letters barely distinguishable to himself.

The snake's tongue flickered through the air and somehow- by some sort of magical means, the snake's voice (that's all it could be) whispered.

His heart, it somehow said, impressions yet distinct words that pressed against Skylar's brain like a wax seal. *Is mine.*

"I don't understand." Skylar felt tears slide over the side of his face, "I- what did you *do? How?* I can't- how are you doing this?"

The snake lowered itself, curling itself into a sinewy mass of black scales. Its yellow belly was hidden, it became shapeless from where it's body ended.

"This- I'm hallucinating." Skylar whimpered, whining as he kept crying. He couldn't get the screams out of his *head.*

The snake hissed, a very snake-sound instead of the strange noise from earlier.

"Are- are you saying that this...this woman, it...she made him sick?"

The snake hesitated, wavering as if in thought.

"I don't understand. I want to *help* him." Skylar stressed, "I don't- what did he *do?* How do- how do you have his *heart?"*

The snake's tongue kissed the air. Its gaze could kill a man.

Half. It clarified with broken whispers. *Split.*

"Okay," Skylar breathed shakily, ignoring the fact he was talking to a *snake,* "And the screaming? Who was the woman?"

Merlin, Lutain wasn't an Animagus or a familiar, he was something else. Something unholy and demonic, but nonetheless something new.

The snake paused, gathering its words. *Adalonda.*

That was the name of the Basilisk. The giant, murderous basilisk. The name Adrian argued against, delirious and stumbling in the forest.

"Do…" Skylar's voice was wavering, "Do...do you think that...was she persuading him?"

Lutain's tail spasmed in fury. Unspoken but easily interpreted rage.

"Do...do you think that...that it was wrong?"

'Are you upset with the basilisk? With whatever it gave him?' Skylar wanted to ask, but was fearful for his own voice.

The snake gave a subtle nod. Skylar felt his heart pounding, racing harder and fast enough he could hear it in his ears. He felt like static, as if his fingertips and toes were not there at all.

The snake was angry with the basilisk, the basilisk somehow had...had *hurt* Adrian.

What would this creature ask of Skylar? What could it possibly want in some sort of...of restitution?

'An eye for an eye' Skylar thought to himself, mouth moving to feel the words on his lips. That sounded… That sounded like a strain of justice Adrian Selwyn would indulge in.

And if Skylar was sure of anything, it was how linked the boy was to his familiar.

"Do you think that...do you *want* me to...to get rid of the basilisk?" Skylar asked, leaning forward to look at the snake with as much seriousness as he could muster.

'Do you want me to kill Adalonda?' Skylar thought to himself with a certainty that no longer permitted it to be a question. *'An eye for an eye?'*

Lutain opened his mouth with a savage hiss. *Yes.*

[If you have an idea or a scene you would like to see, click here to join the Reader Contribution page and leave your own ideas or concepts. All will be addressed or even added into the story.]

Horcrux

Chapter Summary

> Where Lutain is more that he appears, Adrian ponders escaping, and Bellatrix is not happy.

Chapter Notes

> The first spin-off chapter has been posted for this series. It's an early reveal fic, since the majority of you are impatient for a reveal!

'I'll do what it takes. It hurts, It hurts and I can't think and I keep hearing it but I'll do what it takes I'll be useful I swear I'll be useful I promise I'll be usefu-'

Skylar Potter jolted down the steps of the Burrow, socks thumping and nearly sending him tripping down the steps. The snake around his shoulders tightened itself suddenly, hissing a warning at the jerky movement.

"Sorry sorry!" Skylar apologized hastily, rushing down the steps once more.

"Mum!" Skylar beamed, waving quickly when he spotted her red hair.

"Sky!" She smiled back, running one hand through her hair, wrinkles on the corner of her eyes as she smiled, "How are you?"

"Great! You get him alright?" Skylar asked, leaning over to exchange a quick hug as from the doorway, Albus Dumbledore stepped through.

"Skylar, how wonderful to see you." Dumbledore smiled, a bright light in his eye as he observed the other, "Skylar, I'd like to introduce you to an old friend and colleague of mine."

Lily nearly danced to the side, stepping out of the way to allow the newest man to step through the doorway, looking strangely paranoid and wary of his surroundings.

"Skylar Potter, this is Horace Slughorn."

Horace Slughorn was an old man, looking battered and spooked like an alley cat having brought inside. His clothing reminded Skylar of Remus' earthy tones, yet they looked more ramshackle.

His eyes widened in surprise, flickering to Skylar's face before his face shifted into a crooked smile. "Skylar Potter, why I never."

Lily smiled as Horace looked at her in awe, she proudly ruffled Skylar's hair.

"Slughorn here used to be my potions professor back when I was your age, Sky."

Horace looked at least a little startled, "Ah, but that was a long time ago! Funny rumors have reached me since Dolores Umbridge left!"

"Professor Umbridge ran afoul of our centaur herd. Insulted them outright, as well as a basilisk."

"That's what she did, did she?" said Slughorn. "Idiotic woman. Never liked her, a shame what happened."

Skylar gave a small dark chuckle, enough to remind the few there that Skylar had been there to witness such a scene. The atmosphere lilted slightly, a hesitation in the room as they very clearly realized their mistake. Skylar for some reason, wasn't as distressed over the memory as he used to be- darkly amused perhaps, but not as sorrowful. It was strange how quickly tragedy was forgotten, or repressed for more lively thoughts.

"I recruited Horace here in hopes he may break through to young Selwyn." Dumbledore looked apologetic, eyebrows furrowing slightly in very genuine concern. "I'm very worried for the boy."

"Yes, from what I've heard it seems some sort of strange concoction ails the child." Slughorn wheezed, looking sympathetic yet also intrigued. "Avery, you said his name was?"

"Adrian," Lily corrected him quickly, "Adrian Selwyn."

Skylar knew, that Adrian would *hate* this man.

Skylar had forgotten about the snake until it shifted, popping its head up in curiosity. Lily gasped in surprise, taking a step back in alarm.

Dumbledore moved, taking three steps approaching Skylar before pausing, eying the snake with a very calm appearance. It was impressive considering the violent and loud reactions both Ron and Hermione treated Skylar with before. Snakes were something to be terrified of- especially with the memory of the basilisk so fresh.

"Skylar," Dumbledore began, very calmly as if Skylar did not have a large serpent around his neck. He felt the snake coil slightly tighter, clearly afraid.

"Sir, I- it's okay." Skylar slowly lifted his arms, showing that he, and by default, the snake weren't a problem, "It ah, it gets lonely."

Slughorn peered around, eyes widening in dazed surprise as he spotted the snake. Once you got past Lutain's terrifying power, he was rather beautiful.

"Merlin's beard! I haven't seen- is that an African Coalspire?"

Lutain lowered himself, settling its head on a coil with a hollow *thump* of dull interest. Skylar resisted the urge to smile- Lutain almost *radiated* annoyance, Slughorn had likely been wrong in his assumption over the species. Sky was almost positive that Adrian had mentioned that Lutain wasn't a magical species.

"Ah, I don't know." Skylar apologized sheepishly, it wasn't as if he could correct him after all, "I've been carrying him around. He likes uh... he's smart and understands English."

Dumbledore had a small frown on his face, although Horace seemed absolutely mesmerized. Who wouldn't be?

"Why it's in perfect condition! What a beautiful specimen! My, even it's facial scales are intact!"

Lutain flicked its tongue and tightened itself without care. Skylar reached up to pet him, running fingers over the smooth scales. They were small and rounded, much smaller than what Skylar had always assumed they would be. They felt strange under his fingertips, smooth and soft. He stroked the snake's body with his hand absentmindedly, almost drugged by the relaxing movement.

"I thought you didn't like snakes, Sky." Lily asked cautious, looking afraid as if the creature would bite her. That was a justified fear, although Skylar never thought Lutain had ever bitten anyone. At least, he hadn't ever heard of Lutain biting someone.

"Yeah but Lutain's different." Skylar struggled to explain, words were lacking. "He was Adrian's familiar after all."

Horace gasped in surprise, "A *familiar?* My! I haven't seen a serpent familiar since-"

all at once his face clouded and he looked almost ashamed, "Well, since Nagini…"

Lutain's head snapped up, staring at Horace attentively. Something thrummed in Skylar's skin, buzzing and loud like bees. Skylar turned his neck, feeling the cool scales press against his cheek. It was a very calming sensation.

"Skylar, perhaps you should untangle yourself." Dumbledore suggested slowly, although took care to not walk closer, "only for a second."

No! Something in Sky snapped, the idea of removing Lutain was...was… *painful* to comprehend. Why would he take off Lutain? Why would- *why?*

"Yes, yes perhaps that would be for the best." Lily advised, reaching out with her hands as if to lift the massive black snake from Skylar's shoulders. The buzzing was sharp, thrumming and pulsing and it almost *hurt.*

Skylar took a step backwards, using one hand to hold Lutain's head to his shoulder, keeping him secured. The cool scales were so soothing against his skin, he felt almost feverish.

Lutain gave a low hiss, and tightened further. Skylar couldn't tell where Lutain ended and he began anymore.

"Skylar my boy, perhaps that would be wise." Horace tried, eying the snake with something hidden, "Ah, hello...serpent. It is a pleasure to meet you."

Lutain hissed, his mouth opening as he tucked his head further back, retreating under the cavern of Skylar's palm. Lutain's eyes almost *glowed* a dark maroon, staring out from the darkness with full concentration.

Dumbledore frowned, then with his left hand he reached out slowly to the snake. His left hand was black, withered in a way which for some reason was revolting. A beautiful black ring was on his hand, sparkling in the light.

Skylar believed fully that Lutain was going to strike, that he was going to sink fangs into flesh and leave venom crawling through blood like the sluggish drip of molasses.

The ring sparkled, catching the light- the pressure gently released and Skylar felt cold.

Lutain moved toward the ring entranced. He was flickering his tongue rapidly as he stretched further and further out until he was barely able to support himself.

Plop. Lutain fell to the floor, looking just as undignified and offended as he should. Had the snake not realized what it was doing? Had it not realized how hypnotized it was by Dumbledore's outstretched hand?

Skylar felt as if someone had opened a door, a sudden waft of air caressing his skin. Something fresh, although he couldn't describe it properly.

"How unusual." Horace blinked, watching as the snake hurriedly scaled itself up a coat stand, trying to climb its way up to the peak to get to somewhere safe, "How...what a unique personality. It's rather interesting."

Lutain hissed in offense, flaring with something that left an impressionable sensation of anger. *Male! Lutain!*

Skylar's mouth twitched, finding the indignation almost amusing. The impression was a bit different, a bit more distorted and weakened without the touch. Lutain must have sent it out to the local environment instead of through Skylar as a conduit. The emotion and thought was out loud, spoken by the snake for others to hear.

Evidently, the others were alarmed by the projected emotion.

Dumbledore paled, taking a step backwards and aging many years in a moment. Horace inhaled sharply, looking horrified as if he had witnessed something unspeakable. Lily didn't understand, but she grabbed Skylar and yanked him away from the snake with the instinct only a mother possessed. Something in Skylar yearned to be closer to the snake, to assist him back to safety. It made Skylar's fingertips twitch.

"Merlin's beard." Horace wheezed, looking very much like he didn't want to be in that spot.

"Skylar," Dumbledore spoke almost sadly, "how long have you been in contact with this...with *Lutain."*

Lutain's tail twisted, and suddenly the black creature seemed very sinister.

"I- I don't know. Just...just since Adrian was taken away." Skylar felt shaken, hollow in a way only deep shame could accomplish, "I- what's wrong, Sir?"

"Horace." Dumbledore stated instead, and with careful movements Horace approached the snake, his arms in the air to show he was no threat.

"A pleasure to meet you Lutain. I- I was curious, you seem rather intelligent for a species such as yourself."

Lutain flicked his tongue, as if to point out that Horace Slughorn hadn't even identified him properly.

"He talks." Skylar spoke quietly, "N-not in...not in words but he...he whispers. I thinks. Impressions, feelings."

Skylar felt stupid the moment he talked. Of *course* they knew that already, they had felt it just moments prior.

Somehow, saying it out loud was comforting in a strange way. Reassuring to Skylar, that this...*madness* was not something he had to feel alone.

The four were quiet, before Horace plastered a large, obviously fake smile on his face. "Well! How fascinating! My name is Horace Slughorn, why, I remember an old student of mine had a snake rather similar to you! Why, he was practically inseparable from the thing!"

Lutain didn't seem interested, and didn't bother looking at him. The eyes were locked on Skylar, seeing into his heart.

"He...I think we made a deal." Skylar struggled, blinking in surprise before giving a bland bark of laughter, "Wow, how ironic."

It was ironic, it was *painfully* ironic. He had made a deal with Adrian's snake- something which had been the source and cause of Adrian's great collapse in Hogwarts.

What sort of person was Skylar to shove Adrian's failures back into his face?

"A deal?" Lily asked, sounding constantly worried, "I- Skylar. Skylar what *kind* of deal?"

Dumbledore looked at Skylar with guarded caution. He knew something, something that made him fear for Skylar. What threat could Lutain really be? "I can't have you interact with Mr. Selwyn, Skylar."

Skylar shook his head, not looking up from where he stared at the floor. He couldn't back out, he didn't know the ramifications of breaking a deal with snake. Not only that, but he had *promised* Lutain. He owed it to Adrian, he had to somehow make up for all the pain and suffering of the other. "No. I said I'd help kill the basilisk."

Dumbledore's face looked grave, stoney and cold. He didn't look happy, but he didn't look surprised either. "Adalonda."

The name triggered something. Lutain snapped towards Dumbledore, hissing loudly with an impression of *rage*. Lily's breath hitched and she made the smallest sound of retching. The anger was rolling in waves, rushing through them like reflected heat off pavement.

"It- the basilisk…" Skylar struggled to explain, feeling almost desperate to convey things properly. He *had* to explain, he *had* to. "It...it messed with him. It *did* something, and Lutain wants revenge-."

"What did the basilisk do?" Dumbledore's voice was no longer kind. It was cold, careful. He spoke like someone in war, no longer was he treating Skylar as a child. Somehow, they had reached the point where pleasantries did not exist anymore.

Lutain hissed something low, coiling himself together. Skylar felt cold.

(Would things ever recover? Would they ever return to what they once had?)

"It...I don't know." Skylar shook his head, "I- I couldn't understand it, Sir. It...It sounded like he was..like he was being tortured."

"It *sounded* like?" Horace looked baffled, "Skylar my boy, *how* on *Earth* did you hear such a thing?"

"The snake," Dumbledore grimaced tiredly, having clued in to Lutain's capabilities a while back. "It appears, that Lutain is enhanced by magical means. I fear for what has been done to him."

Skylar felt cold, frozen in a numb painful way, "He said his heart. He said that Adrian broke his

heart and gave it to Lutain."

"No." Horace whispered, sounding pained as if witnessing a murder in front of him. The older man looked well on his way to fainting, he was pale and clammy and eyes wet. "No, oh no you poor child."

Dumbledore looked ashen, exhausted and tired and Skylar doubted that things *would* return to normal. This was what life was now, disappointment and pain and would Skylar ever have a moment to *breathe?* "Lily, remove Skylar from here."

"What? *No!"* Skylar protested in alarm, "I- Lutain will only talk to me! You can't- you can't just ask me to leave!"

"You need to stay far away from that creature!" Horace argued, pointing at Lutain with a dark expression. His hand was shaking.

Lutain was hissing, aggressive yet defensive. The bees were back, buzzing and causing Skylar's breathing to increase exponentially.

"He hasn't hurt anyone!" Skylar protested, "He- he said he'll help me!"

"Skylar I apologize, Lutain has become something very dangerous to us all." Dumbledore cautioned with a bland monotone. "I must ask you to remove yourself from his care."

Protect. Lutain seemed to urge, focusing on Skylar, he sounded alarmed. He was ignoring Dumbledore, staring at Skylar desperate to *listen.* Lutain needed to be heard. *Help. Secrets.*

Skylar couldn't let Lutain die, he- he had *promised* him.

"He- what are you going to do with him?"

Dumbledore shook his head carefully, "I do not know."

Nagini. Lutain urged, *Prophecy.*

A prophecy?

"What?" Skylar blurted in surprise, "What...what prophecy?"

Dumbledore inhaled sharply, as well as Lily.

"Mum?" Skylar asked in worry, "Sir? What...what prophecy? What's going on?"

"Albus, we need to destroy this...this *plague."*

Lutain hissed in offense, body flattening as he flared and Merlin had Lutain always been *that big?*

"Perhaps we should discuss this in a more private location." Horace murmured carefully.

"Indeed. The situation has changed; Lily, would it be possible to chat with Skylar?"

Lily looked pained, weak and old and far too accepting of the situation. Had she known? About this...this mysterious prophecy? "I...alright."

Dumbledore nodded, walking around the coat rack and towards one of the living rooms in the house. Slughorn hastily followed, eying the snake unsure. Lily released Skylar, who took a few

steps towards the big black snake.

"You're not going to hurt me, are you?" Skylar asked under his breath, "I...I know you don't like me. I want to help Adrian, but I can't do that if you hurt me."

Lutain slowly uncoiled before moving his way carefully over Skylar's arms. *Won't. Safe.*

Something like relief spilled through Skylar, removing anxiety that gnawed on him since Lutain had stopped touching him. It soothed an itch inside Skylar's skull, under his skin. The scales remedied his trembling, calmed him in a lulling drone that was addictive and relaxing.

(Was this what Adrian felt? Was this what drove him to scream and cry and *burn everything?*)

"Thank you," Skylar murmured, making sure the creature was secure before he made his way into the room where Dumbledore and Slughorn were waiting for him. Lily didn't follow, she watched him walk away helpless to stop her son.

Once Skylar passed the entry way into the room, Dumbledore waved his wand and a black shimmering barrier set itself over the door, effectively silencing the enclosed space. Dumbledore's eyes widened in alarm when he spotted the snake, coiled tightly around Skylar again. He didn't say anything, but his displeasure was obvious.

"Have a seat, Skylar."

Skylar sat, Lutain uncoiled to lay on his lap.

"I have a question for you, Lutain." Dumbledore asked the snake, calmly setting his wand on the table between them to show he was not a threat, "Do you perhaps know of who I am?"

The snake paused, something uncertain twisting through Skylar. Skylar's breathing hilted, picking up slightly in pace as Lutain tilted his head, observing Dumbledore in silent interest. Slowly, Lutain lifted his upper torso, seated in Skylar's lap like a reared cobra.

Very clearly, Lutain nodded.

Horace wheezed and whispered something under his breath.

"He said that...he said that Adrian was sick. He wants to fix him." Skylar spoke, blurting his words although they felt dry, *wrong.* Impulsiveness he couldn't describe, as if he just *needed* to talk, to try to explain, "He...Professor, Adrian was *screaming."*

Dumbledore's blue eyes were piercing, "Lutain showed you this?"

"I heard it." Skylar almost whispered, he could hear it *now.* The screaming, the piercing *agony,* "It was...it was one of the worst things I've ever heard."

Horace closed his eyes and set his head in his hands, "A spell. Did he cast a spell?"

"No, I...he stabbed something. He...he stabbed something I think? Or he cut something in half, and he gave it to Lutain?"

Heart. Lutain supplied with a haunting whisper. *Life.*

"His heart," Skylar repeated without thinking, feeling very tired all the way to his bones, "his life."

"His soul," Horace moaned in pain, "Oh Merlin, that snake is a horcrux."

"A...a what?" Skylar scrambled to think. He had never heard the word before. Lutain hadn't either from the small rise of curiosity.

"A horcrux is the word used for an object in which a person has concealed part of their soul."

That would make sense, but it didn't make sense for how to achieve it. It didn't...things weren't lining up.

(Yet in some ways, Skylar accepted it as truth instantly, as if he *knew* it was true. Somehow, Lutain knew it was true.)

Skylar blinked, "I..I don't understand how that works, Sir."

"By splitting your soul, you ensure that if your body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die. For part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged." Dumbledore explained blandly, eyes not leaving the snake, as if he was addressing the reptile instead of Skylar himself.

Lutain tilted his head as if confused by the information. He (*They?*) didn't understand.

"Sir, is it possible to...to *make* one without *knowing* you're making one?" Skylar asked with dread pooling in his gut.

Slughorn gave a bark of a laugh, "Unlikely! To create a horcrux, why, a soul is supposed to remain intact and whole. Splitting it is an act of violation, it is against *nature."*

Skylar flinched, something twisting in humming intrigue. "Would...would it make a dementor scared of you?"

The room chilled, Dumbledore looking alarmed while Slughorn looked confused. They hadn't thought of that, they hadn't taken that concept into consideration.

(Something sat wrong with it, like the bitter taste of soap under Skylar's tongue.)

"...It may be."

No. Lutain spoke, a strong sense of *wrongness* as the snake thrashed. *Soon.*

"How soon?" Skylar asked, suddenly aware of the silence in the room, "When...when was the vision you showed me?"

Forest. Adalonda. Luna.

(Yes yes that made sense, that was *certainty* as clear to Skylar as the sky was blue and the sun hung in the sky.)

"The day Luna died. He did it that night." Skylar felt like vomiting, a strange sense of calm and acceptance keeping his nausea at bay. "He made you into a horcrux that night."

"The spring holidays," Dumbledore exhaled shakily, "This only provides more questions than answers."

"To split your soul...to go against nature… you can only accomplish that by an act of evil- the supreme act of evil. By committing murder. Killing rips the soul apart, Skylar."

What were they-

They were implying that it was...it was *Luna?*

No, something was so inexplicably *wrong.* Adrian- he would *never* hurt Luna. It was a offense, a statement against nature that Adrian would even *consider* murdering Luna!

(Skylar had seen Luna's body with his *own eyes,* Adrian had been nowhere *near it.*)

Skylar shook his head, "He- no. No. No he...he *loved* Luna. It...they they d-died *after!"*

"Which is why this is a concerning thought." Dumbledore admitted sagely, "It means, that somehow within the castle, Adrian Selwyn committed cold blooded murder."

Lutain hissed something that sounded almost like a felt amused. Skylar felt so, so very sick.

"Merlin's Beard," Slughorn breathed, "How many students has he killed, Albus? How many people have died?"

"Umbridge," Skylar blurted, "...Luna, or she died somehow. I don't know. Suzie Forestar. Cedric Diggory- but that wasn't... and Ginny Weasley."

Dumbledore looked pained, and didn't object to a single name.

"Albus, one of your students has *killed."* Horace could barely whisper, "He...*who died?"*

"Lutain?" Skylar whispered, drawing the attention of the black snake, "Please. Who did he kill?"

Lutain's jaw opened and he hissed like the breaking of someone's lungs-

He exhaled and exhaled and it filled the air and Skylar's ears and nose and his *eyes.* It was choking and suffocating and his ears *rang* with the low buzzing whispery exhale of Lutain's voice.

"No- no… I- Adalonda no…"

"So stubborn. So useless, and because of you, Lutain will die. To kill Lutain...You're useless."

"No I'm not...I...please don't leave me….Adalonda!"

Skylar keeled over, collapsing onto the floor with gasping wheezes. Barely aware, he noticed the table and Lutain go soaring to the other side of the room, far away from where Skylar was choking on his spit. Lutain thrashed against his magical barrier, twisting in *rage.*

(Skylar could feel it, distantly. Twisting and curling in his gut, how he wanted Dumbledore and Slughorn to *hurt-*)

"Skylar!" Dumbledore urged, propping the smaller male up in his arms, "Skylar! Are you okay!"

(Skylar felt the desire to reach up and claw the old man's eyes from his skull like ripened cherry tomatoes, to pluck them out, out of *spite.*)

Skylar felt like he had been hit, the screaming and crying and *devastation* burning deep to his center.

"He didn't- he didn't make- he didn't know." Skylar wheezed, still dizzy and trying to get the screaming and sobs out of his head. Skylar wanted to cry, he couldn't forget it. He couldn't forget the *cruel* noise of that basilisk.

(He was going to *kill her.*)

"What are you on about?" Horace asked, bordering on hysteria as he pointed his wand in a shaky grip towards Lutain.

"Skylar, Skylar what did you see?" Dumbledore urged in alarm, helping the boy remain upright.

"Adrian, he didn't know about horcrux. He wasn't...he wasn't trying to live forever." Skylar croaked out, "He was trying to keep Lutain *alive."*

The room stilled and Horace looked strangely conflicted, "That...that is a truly strange twisted idea."

Dumbledore looked exhausted beyond words, "If so, we have greatly underestimated Mr. Selwyn."

"I don't think at any point in my life have I been considered 'normal', Black." Adrian dryly stated, picking at the dull grey clothing that looked similar to prisoner garb, "If you've found something I'm overlooking, I'd be delighted for you to tell me."

Sirius frowned, leaning back on his chair, "Well...you and that Luna girl had a good-"

Adrian flinched, and Sirius cut himself off sharply.

Adrian inhaled slowly through his nose, hands clenching and then relaxing, twitching uncontrollably.

"She was a good friend." Adrian spoke quietly in the room, "I never called her my friend. I hadn't thought she was."

The room was quiet as Adrian regulated his breathing carefully.

"I think, that in the end she was. A friend." Adrian watched his fingers bend into a fist, "She was. I think I loved her. I don't know. Everything is so muddled."

Sirius felt Adrian's oppressive gaze, heavy and nearly suffocating as it landing on him, "Do you know what this is?"

"What?" Sirius asked, his throat scratchy for some unknown reason.

Adrian blinked slowly, like a cat. He tilted his head innocently like a child, eyes a hypnotic diseased color; green with a starburst ring around his pupils. "I don't know. I think I loved her, but now I can't remember what it was like. What anything is like. Are you afraid of me?"

Sirius shook his head, "No, I mean...you've had bad decisions, but it wasn't your fault…"

"You've read my book," Adrian's eyes widened suddenly before constricting unnaturally, "You're looking at the end. You're reading it backwards. It isn't finished, Black."

Sirius felt like something cold pressed against his spine. He- how the blazes with Selwyn know-

"Crouch is dead. Apparently he was diseased, or something like that. Or perhaps he was just too mad." Adrian blinked in thought, "Am *I* mad? I don't feel mad, but I must be."

Sirius shook his head, opening his mouth to argue.

Adrian lolled his head to the side, looking at him through the greasy layer of his fringe, "I'm not insane like Bella. I must be different."

Sirius had a very strange feeling that he was staring at something not human any longer. The idea was ridiculous, hell, he was *best friends* with Remus!

But...something about Adrian was...wrong. Different, strange in an unsettling *wrong* way.

"I didn't mean to set the train on fire," Adrian blinked slowly, the vibrant yellow sunburst ring around his pupil was sick against his pale clammy skin, "I didn't. I wanted to hurt Draco, but I didn't mean to set the train on fire. Isn't that strange?"

"Accidental magic is common," Sirius sagely added, "You have a good level of control over it,"

Adrian blinked slowly. Sirius got the impression that the other boy was somehow lost in thought, or going through a crisis without consciously realizing it.

"I could set this entire room on fire." Adrian mused quietly, "I could burn this entire house down and kill you. Burning people smell a lot like burning meat."

Sirius realized, that he was afraid. He was quite afraid actually.

Adrian blinked slowly almost in realization himself, "I *could* burn this house down."

"You could," Sirius agreed, his voice a hoarse croak. His palms were sweating. "You *could* burn this house down, but you'd be stuck here."

"I could apparate." Adrian pondered.

"We have wards along the property. Put up by a curse breaker and Dumbledore."

Adrian pouted slightly, eyes glazing as he hummed to himself in thought.

Sirius needed to talk to Dumbledore immediately, he had a very bad feeling that this boy was going to eventually result in something horrible.

"What if I only set *you* on fire, and took your wand and walked out?"

Sirius licked his lips anxiously, very mindful of where his wand was tucked against his forearm, "You wouldn't have enough control to do that without a wand."

Adrian hummed to himself, "Remus would be sad. If I cooked you like a brisket."

Sirius monitored his breathing carefully, like how the auror's had trained him, "Remus would be very sad."

Adrian hummed to himself, a flat monotone sound that didn't seem more than a reminder that he could in fact, make noise. It as a blank humming, like dozens of bees stirring in his throat. Adrian seemed distant, uncaring of the noise he was making.

(Or how it was driving through Sirius' ears and making his blood rush like he was underwater.)

"You're very chatty." Sirius choked out, feeling more embarrassed by how strangled he sounded.

Adrian blinked slowly before shrugging one shoulder, his humming fading off. "I don't see a point anymore in playing coy."

"Were you always playing coy with us?"

"Of course I was. It doesn't matter anymore, or at least it doesn't matter to me. Few things do anymore."

Bellatrix looked horrible. She had always appeared sick, eyes too wide and nostrils flared in a permanent expression of anger. Sometimes she would grin, lips curling back so far her teeth could be spotted sprouting from her gums, discolored slightly.

Now...now she was so pale that she seemed to shine in the darkness. Her long brown hair was snarled into a large birds nest, frizzy and hanging over her shoulders like a used mop.

"I don't think this is necessary!" Bellatrix hissed out, darting after her sister. Narcissa threw back her hood, her long blonde hair gave her the look of a drowned person.

She knocked on the door, using her shoulder to gracelessly shove it open the moment the latch was moved.

"Narcissa!" said the man, stepping aside as light fell upon her and her sister too, "What a pleasant surprise."

"Severus," Narcissa said in a heavily strained whisper.
"May I speak to you? It's urgent."

"But of course."

They passed into the house, Bellatrix pausing to twist her face into a grimace. Snape kept himself composed.

They stepped into a tiny sitting room, which was dark and smelled of old parchment. Every wall was covered in books, most of them bound in old black or brown leather; a threadbare sofa was pressed in one available space with a rickety table nearest the arm. The place had an air of neglect, as though it was not usually inhabited.

They settled, Narcissa with a sense of urgency and Bellatrix with a much slower sense of paranoia.

"Severus, I know I ought not to be here, I have been told to say nothing to anyone, but-"

"Then you ought to hold your tongue!" snarled Bellatrix, her eyes widening so far that all edges of her iris were visible, "Particularly in present company!"

"Present company?" repeated Snape sardonically. "And what am I to understand by that, Bellatrix?"

"That I don't trust you, Snape, as you very well know!"

Narcissa made a noise that might have been a dry sob and covered her face with her hands. Snape lowered himself backwards into his chair, arms on the velvet armrests on either side. Bellatrix looked pained.

"Narcissa, I think we ought to hear what Bellatrix is bursting to say; it will save tedious interruptions."

Bellatrix rumbled with a snarl.

"I think that this is meaningless!" She hissed, nearly leaping to her feet with the aggression of a panther, "Where to start! Where were you when the Dark Lord fell? Why did you never make any attempt to find him when he vanished? What have you been doing all these years that you've lived in Dumbledore's pocket? Why did you never return? Why did you not *bring him back!"*

She paused, her chest rising and falling rapidly. Her cheeks were flushed, behind her, Narcissa sat motionless.

Snape smiled thinly.

"Do you really think that the Dark Lord has not asked me each and every one of those questions? And do you really think that, had I not been able to give satisfactory answers, I would be sitting here talking to you?"

Bellatrix hesitated.

"I know he believes you, but…"

"You think he is mistaken? Or that I have somehow tricked him? Fooled the Dark Lord, the greatest wizard, the most accomplished Legilimens the world has ever seen?"

Bellatrix said nothing, but there was something in her eyes that glowed darkly with a sense of hate.

"I believed him finished. I am not proud of it, I was wrong, but there it is...If he had not forgiven we who lost faith at the time, he would have very few followers left."

"He'd have me!" Bellatrix protested passionately, "I have followed his work in his absence!"

"Yes, indeed, most admirable." Snake said in a bored voice, "How honorable, running with rumors of you adopting a truly lackluster child to stave your boredom."

Bellatrix froze with widened eyes.

"Severus." Narcissa whispered, interrupting quietly, "Perhaps I should speak."

"*Lackluster?"* Bellatrix hissed with the viciousness of the Dark Lord's familiar.

"Severus, I- I think you are the only one who can help me, I have nowhere else to turn. Lucius cannot offer assistance and…" Narcissa closed her eyes in exhaustion, two tears seeping from the corners of her eyes. "The Dark Lord has forbidden me to speak of it. He wishes none to know of the plan. It is...very secret. But-"

"If he has forbidden it, you ought not to speak." Snape suggested calmly, "His word is law."

Narcissa gaped in horror and Bellatrix still grimaced with a sense of seething.

"Lackluster." Bellatrix clipped out, positively frosty, "You *dare* call…"

"I must ask for silence, Bellatrix, as it appears such conversation is between Narcissa and I only."

Narcissa sighed into her hands and Bellatrix shifted her weight, looking decidedly unimpressed.

"I was the one who chose Draco for this plan." Bellatrix divulged indifferently, causing Narcissa to look at her in growing horror. "*I* was the one granted the final say over our preparations."

Oh, oh that was a sudden change.

"And because of that, *Snape.* Because of what you *said,* I have decided that you're included as well." Bellatrix hissed, "Dare you fail I will murder you *myself."*

"Bella," Narcissa whispered, tears sliding down her pale cheeks. "My son...my only son…"

"What about *mine!"* She screeched like a harpy, "He- *He* has taken him and placed him in such a position! If not for his treachery your child would not be involved!"

Snape's mind leapt to conclusions rather quickly, "Ah, I see then this pertains to the child Adrian Selwyn."

Bellatrix's eyes narrowed, "Lackluster."

Snape withheld a flinch.

"You are now entrusted to enable Draco with his mission," Bellatrix grinned, baring her teeth savagely, "You have until the end of Summer."

"Bella!" Narcissa cried in pain, "You- It was until *Christmas."*

"I changed my mind." She snapped back, "I had never understood the pain of a lost child, *Cissy.* It would be a shame for *both* of us to experience it."

Narcissa flinched and whimpered quietly.

"What are your intentions then, granted that they *are* from the Dark Lord."

Bellatrix smirked once in victory, "Return my child to me. Assist Draco in infiltrating where you've *hidden* him, and return Cerestes to us."

Snape froze. His face was unreadable, on the interior he had frozen as if in the face of an arctic fleury.

"I struggle to see how young Draco is relevant in this task."

"I want you to *struggle."*

Snape averted his eyes to the floor and with a terse nod Bellatrix laughed.

"If you tell your *precious Order."* She seethed, stepping forward until her wand was pressed under his jaw, "Then I will gut Lily Potter and make you *eat her entrails."*

"I don't fail." Snape coldly responded, aware of the threat.

"Good." Bellatrix whispered, her breath was sour. "Cerestes will kill you *himself."*

"Months. Summer end."

Adrian hummed contently, arms crossed behind his head with his eyes closed. The room was dark, but he knew he wasn't alone.

"*My birthday then?"* Adrian hissed back in inquiry, dull interest. What an excellent present.

"Yes." Nagini hissed in broken words, sliding under his clothes like a caress. *"Draco. Severus."*

Adrian felt a curl on his lips, *"Really? That will be interesting. I'm sure Lutain misses me. Let me*

know what day they are coming for me, I'd hate to miss it."

Nagini didn't comprehend, but the tattoo didn't need to.

Adrian would be leaving. He would be returned to his father.

As a weapon, as a tool to be used but truly, did it really matter anymore?

Did he actually even have a *life* anymore?

Sooner or later, everyone would be dead. Why should he remain in captivity if it would prolong the inevitable. Why would he entertain his captors when he could maybe *(maybe)* find some sort of purpose intended for him?

(It wasn't as if he had anything left in his life now, if not for his destiny.)

Adrian smiled in the dark.

The smile faltered, twisting into a small frown as Adrian felt the vibration of feet on wood- stomps up the steps. Sirius, the quick gait that Adrian recognized as him.

Sirius opened the door, slipping in and closing the door behind him quickly.

Sirius paused one moment before flipping on the light switch, no mercy for how Adrian recoiled from the sudden brightness.

"Merlin, are you done brooding yet?" Sirius muttered to himself, likely not aware that Adrian could hear it at all. "You going to talk about that damn book yet?"

Of course Adrian wasn't going to talk about that.

'Although…' Adrian thought to himself, righting himself slowly to stare at Sirius with wide eyes. He didn't dare sink into the man's skull again, he didn't know if Dumbledore or Snape would investigate or had somehow created defenses for the case.

"You went through my things," Adrian spoke, not a question with how he *knew* the dog had. "You saw the ledger?"

Sirius looked surprised and startled, clearly the conversation had been derailed, "meticulous work you put into that. I was surprised."

Adrian wasn't fishing for complements, "how many Galleons were in the net gain in the back."

Sirius looked startled by the whiplash "I- a bit. Quite a sum actually, why? Planning on hiring a lawyer?"

Adrian breathed slowly to calm the hitch in his breath. His hands twitched, curling into shaking fists. Sirius noticed and his eyes widened slightly, already beginning to inquire if Adrian was okay.

"I need you to access the vault." Adrian snapped out, voice harsher than he intended. "All the galleons in that vault. Send them to Xenophilius Lovegood." Adrian stopped talking and breathed slowly to make sure the warbling wouldn't be heard.

Sirius swallowed thickly and when he responded his voice cracked in turn. "A-alright."

Here's a link to this chapter's fanart!

Wren

Chapter Summary

Adrian is shown love and warmth, enjoys baths, and Skylar finds a bird.

Chapter Notes

Wow, I've gotten an insane amount of fanart so I'll be sprinkling that through the text where it applies, and also at the bottom!

'Why did they get rid of me. Why am I so replaceable?'

Skylar Potter was shopping for his books and new supplies.

That was it. He swore that was *all* he was doing.

He was accompanied by Ron and Hermione, keeping the conversation light and without banter. They were there for books, that was all they were there for.

Skylar hated it. Skylar absolutely *hated* the fact they were shopping. *Why,* why was it so important that they shop for school supplies?

It seemed entirely *asinine,* the fact they would be shopping for books.

(Skylar had watched people die in front of him, he had faced dragons and thestrals and a *basilisk.* He had to *search Umbridge's corpse for his wand.*)

And they just- they *expected him to buy books?*

There was something inexplicably wrong about it, about the concept of returning to Hogwarts. It felt to Skylar like he was...like he was *ignoring* the past, that he was *ignoring everything that happened.*

(He felt disgusted, as if the death and suffering and everything he experienced was *nothing.*)

Voldemort was *alive,* shouldn't Skylar be doing something important? Like *helping to stop him?*

Lutain shifted under Skylar's robes, causing Skylar to flinch. Ron paused, breaking off mid word uncomfortably. He didn't resume what he was saying.

"Sorry," Skylar apologized quietly. Ron swallowed and took a small step away- the red head was painfully timid of anything that hissed now.

(It was understandable, but Skylar couldn't fathom being apart from the snake. It was...impossible to comprehend, painful to imagine).

They were shopping, and it was only due to *pure* coincidence that Skylar had an unimpeded view out of the window.

Lutain did also, the snake rumbled a low dissatisfied noise as the two saw an infamous student hurrying up the street alone.

Lutain made way to chase, managing a few inches from Skylar's neck. Skylar reached up to hastily to shove its face back under his collar.

"Sky?" Hermione asked warily, following his eyesight before she too frowned.

"Wonder where his mummy is?" said Skylar, frowning and in thought. It was incredibly suspicious.

"Given her the slip by the looks of it. Hasn't he always shopped with his father?" said Ron.

"Not today. Why, though?" said Hermione.

Skylar frowned; he was thinking too hard. Narcissa Malfoy would not have let her precious son out of sight willingly; Malfoy must have made a real effort to free himself from her clutches. With how tensions were rising and even more whispers of the Dark Lord were stirring, Malfoy must have pulled an impressive maneuver to escape her clutches.

But *why,* why would Draco Malfoy be sneaking around for book supplies so late in the day? Shops were close to closing, the street was fairly empty.

Skylar, knowing and loathing Malfoy, was sure the reason could not be innocent.

"Think we could follow?" Skylar asked lowly, Hermione chewed her lip in concern.

"Got your cloak?" Ron asked in form of an answer, already helping to block the view as Skylar fumbled in his bag. He had taken to never leaving home without it, as per Dumbledore's request.

"I don't know, Skylar." Hermione worried.

"Come on," Ron shushed. She hesitated a second, then ducked under the cloak with Skylar and Ron. Nobody noticed them vanish; the trio squeezed their way out of the door as quickly as they could but by the time they gained the street, Malfoy had disappeared just as successfully as they had.

It was the right thing to follow Malfoy. Maybe it was foolish hope, but Malfoy *was* a Slytherin, perhaps he knew something about Adrian that they didn't. Perhaps he was tied into this- or he knew something. Malfoy may know something that had far greater implications than anyone thought of.

"He was going in that direction," Skylar murmured, shuffling them until they were scurrying along the street. They peered left and right, glancing through shop windows and doors until Hermione gasped and shoved them forward.

"That's him, turning left?"

Malfoy glanced around, then slid into Knockturn Alley and out of sight.

Definitely nothing good, but considering how twisted and corrupt the world itself was now, it was nothing less than Skylar expected. Lutain thrummed in contentment, perhaps the snake too had

figured it as well.

They hurried after, ignoring how the cloak fluttered and exposed their ankles. Knockturn Alley, the side street devoted to the Dark Arts, looked completely deserted. They peered into windows as they passed, but none of the shops seemed to have many customers. It did seem a bit dangerous and suspicious to buy Dark artifacts, or at least to be seen buying them.

Lutain hissed, wriggling his way free before flopping out onto the cobblestone and taking off speedily. Skylar cursed and Hermione jumped, nearly trampling the animal with her shoes. Ron flinched away, yet the three followed hastily.

"Look! He's in there!" Hermione breathed, barely audible to the two boys.

Lutain on cue reared outside the window, looking in with a strange level of intelligence. A snake couldn't open a door, no matter how smart in the end.

Draco Malfoy was barely visible in the window, his back to the front of the store. He was half visible, obscured by a black cabinet. Judging by the movement's of his hands, Malfoy was talking animatedly. The proprietor of the shop, Mr. Borgin, an oily-haired, stooping man, stood facing Malfoy. He was wearing a curious expression of mingled resentment and fear.

"If only we could hear what they're saying!" Hermione muttered angrily.

Lutain didn't appear to be bothered by this, because without much hesitation the snake tilted itself and slammed itself against the glass with a quiet *thump.*

The noise normally would have been too muffled to hear, but with the vacancy of the street the two occupants inside the stoor heard it quite clearly. They peered at the window, squinting to try and discern what had made the noise.

Mr. Borgin stamped his way to the front of the store, grimacing with an expression of disgust when he spotted Lutain, leaning against the glass like a haphazardly thrown coil of rope.

"Oi! Off!" The man shouted through the glass, grabbing a nearby umbrella to tap on the glass.

Lutain flicked his tongue once, and the man cursed foul before opening the door to prod the snake.

"Wait!" Malfoy blurted, having walked closer to see what the commotion was. Skylar watched in surprise as Malfoy paled to a shade just shy of parchment. His breathing hitched and he took two steps back, "The- the snake. *Stop!"* He hissed at the owner.

Mr. Borgin paused, his eye twitched but he lowered the umbrella. Lutain seemed pleased, because he slumped down and waited in a calm coil outside the store.

Malfoy stumbled his way outside the store, kicking the door closed behind him to keep the store owner on the other side of the glass.

"You." Malfoy murmured so lowly Skylar doubted the store-owner could hear him, "Where- how are *you* here?"

Lutain's tongue flickered, and Malfoy paled as if he realized something horrible.

"Look, I *know."* Malfoy hissed out, looking on the fringe of desperation, "I- I didn't *know.* I'm *sorry* okay?"

Lutain lifting himself in a sick parody of the basilisk' stance. Malfoy flinched, as if he had seen something familiar.

"I'm doing the best I can!" Malfoy hissed out again, fingers twitching and his skin almost translucent in his fear, "If I had more time-"

Lutain opened his mouth in a terrifying hiss. Malfoy took a short stumble back, throat moving as he swallowed convulsively.

"Fine, fine!" Malfoy snapped, "It'll be done!"

Malfoy turned on his heel as if to storm away before he stiffened with a sharp breath. Lutain made a low noise, something that sounded displeased. Malfoy looked terrified of it.

After a few seconds, Malfoy resumed walking. They watched him leave, before Ron cursed sharply and Hermione let out a breath.

Skylar felt uncomfortable with all of that- would it be possible to stun the boy and take him into custody? Would the trace be in effect with such a populated magical area? Could Skylar even *do* that?

"What was that about?" Ron asked sourly. Lutain turned, seemingly able to know exactly where they were.

"I don't know," Hermione responded quietly, "It- he seemed so *scared."*

Ron and Hermione wouldn't understand, Skylar hadn't expected them to. For as wonderful as his friends were, they were still very innocent and didn't think of the larger picture.

Malfoy looked terrified of Lutain, which meant that Adrian likely had a more violent or prominent position in Slytherin than they had originally assumed.

Or perhaps Malfoy had somehow learned more about Adrian Selwyn himself? Skylar didn't think that Astoria would have told him, she seemed downright *terrified* of Adrian- would she have told her sister, Daphne? Daphne didn't seem the type to spread information, and only something major would have warranted that reaction.

Skylar didn't know, but he knew enough to understand that there was something else at play.

(Did Lutain know? What would it take for him to tell Skylar?)

Lutain stared down the road without moving, and after a second Skylar tugged the cloak off. The alleyway seemed much more terrifying when anyone could see them.

Lutain took off, moving in a completely different direction.

"Shite," Skylar cursed, sprinting to keep the nearly invisible snake in his line of sight. Ron and Hermione cried after, and the three were suddenly scrambling through a thin alleyway up broken steps towards a second alleyway. The snake didn't stop, it kept moving faster and faster until Skylar clued in that it was going towards an intended location.

Then they heard it, unsettling enough that all three slowed to a stop. Lutain stopped grudgingly, watching them annoyed.

A melodic trilling noise was faint, foreign and captivating despite the inherent *wrongness* of it.

"What is that?" Hermione whispered, and abruptly the noise cut off. Lutain made a noise, egging them closer.

They hesitantly stepped around the corner, and the first thing Skylar noticed was how beautiful the fountain was.

It was archaic, cast iron with large statues of fish dribbling clear water in a constant cycle. The size of one of the Prefect baths, it was large enough to swim in, or for a strange creature to lower itself until only its bulbous round eyes looked at them.

The snake hissed, and the creature gurgled something, "Hello again, Sharptail."

Skylar blinked in amazement, and took a half step backwards. The rusting iron of the fountain, along with the dripping water looked suspiciously like blood over the edge of the rim.

"You understood him?" Skylar asked cautiously. The creature tilted her head, her ears were humanoid.

Then it tilted its head back and *laughed,* as if it had realized the most hilarious thing.

"How similar," The creature blinked, before peering at Lutain with something puzzled, "Now *you* smell sour."

Lutain hissed something and the creature *spat* in anger. Something opalescent and scaled moved under the fountain water.

"Skylar, we need to run." Ron urged, already ready to bolt the way they came. The creature chirped like a bird, and looked upset.

Something cawed above them, a large angry crow.

"You reek." the creature's nose wrinkled, pointing one webbed finger at the snake, "You reek *foul.* Plague."

The crow called twice more, and the creature chirped twice like a happy lark, "Plague! Plague!"

Hermione tugged on Skylar's sleeve, as if to drag him away.

(Skylar couldn't leave yet. This...this *thing* knew something.)

"*Oh,"* the creature gurgled, hoisting itself out of the water partially. It looked like it had a disease near its collarbones, scales shimmering and growing out sickly, "Oh you get plague from the other? How sad."

Lutain hissed something, and the creature gave a bark like a seal. Luna would have loved this monstrosity.

(It knew something, Skylar couldn't afford to leave without knowing.)

"No offense!" It giggled like a musical instrument, "Curious. Other child die yet?"

"Selwyn?" Skylar spoke, feeling the worst come from his mouth almost numbly, "What- what do you mean? You know Lutain?"

The creature blinked, a movement that looked painful, "Other child. Related? He's dying."

Lutain hissed and the creature shushed him. "Better hurry."

(Selwyn was dying? Selwyn was going to be *killed?*)

Lutain hissed something final, and without a care for his own being Skylar grabbed the snake's tail and *pulled* him backwards.

"Let's go." Skylar confirmed, eager to get away from the freakish insane creature.

Its weird barkish laughter followed them all the way to Diagon Alley.

(For some reason unknown to Skylar, he wished the weird beast would *die.*)

Adrian was sitting on his bed, eyes open and glazed sightless. The door to his room opened, and without truly reacting he looked.

His eyes sharpened, his breath left him in a small puff and a smile spread, "Remus."

Lupin stepped through, nursing a wicked cut along his jawline and a padded area near his shoulder that suggested a wound. His face was bruised, his eyes sporting shadows but despite it all, he seemed very happy. "Hello, Adrian."

Adrian twisted, righting himself to sit crossed leg on his blanket. The grey clothing hung from him, the hollow of his collarbone was large enough to fit a walnut.

"Oh, Adrian." Remus whispered, as if the sight was something pitiful. Adrian nearly vibrated from the glee and inexplicable happiness.

"You're back! They said you had to talk to werewolves." Adrian continued, sounding far too content and happy given his unhealthy state, "Is that why you're injured?"

Remus swallowed and found the chair Sirius told him would be there, "Ah, yes. A few weren't happy when I tried to advocate for them."

"Of course they wouldn't be." Adrian blinked as if it were obvious, "Fenrir holds the most sway and he was converted years ago."

Remus floundered, and settled for saying nothing in the end.

"I missed you," Adrian confessed, then blinked in surprise as if he hadn't even realized he did.

"I missed you too." Remus spoke. His voice was pinched, strained as if under great stress.

Adrian beamed, a wide smile that had been long since vacant on his face. "You're staying here now, right?"

Remus nodded slowly, "My work is done now. Thank you for taking care of Sirius, I know at times he can be a bit much."

Adrian scowled slightly, "I swear he's illiterate."

Remus chuckled softly, light and breezily, "Don't let him catch you saying that. He'll throw a book at you."

Adrian rolled his eyes, "there aren't any good books left. I took them all."

"From the Black Estate?"

"Bellatrix took me there a long time ago. She let me take books I thought interesting from the library."

Remus' face twitched slightly, "You must have been young."

Adrian tilted his head slightly, his teeth were pink.

Remus inhaled sharply and suddenly, he could smell the faintest twinge of blood.

"Adrian?" Remus asked, his voice firming as he stood suddenly, reaching out with one arm to gently touch the younger's shoulder, "Adrian are you bleeding?"

Adrian blinked in surprise, staring at Remus' hand on his shoulder with something confused, "You're touching me?"

Remus inhaled and suddenly the metallic twinge was much sharper. A drop of blood dripped down Adrian's face, curling over his lip before plopping onto his grey shirt.

Adrian breathed in and out, chest rising and falling gently. Two drops of blood dripped, adding to the single stain with a foreboding warning.

Adrian sniffed, a wet squelching noise, then the stream began.

Remus flinched back, the smell was painfully strong in his nose. Adrian didn't seem alarmed, instead he poked the stain on his shirt, already darkening to a wet disgusting black. His fingertips came away red, he seemed almost mindless of how disgusting the blood was.

He grinned, blood dripping in a frothy pink paste from the corner of his mouth. He coughed, hacking out a globule of pink foam which hung to his mouth by a long strand of saliva.

Something in Remus, something deep inside recoiled at the sight of the blood, the sharp acrid smell. Something in him itched to turn away, to leave Adrian alone like how he was repelled by rabid animals. Something sick, festering and contagious.

"Are you in pain?" Remus asked quickly, gently pulling Adrian's hair back from where a few strands were dangerously close to the sticky situation. "Is the air too dry?"

Adrian coughed again, this time a large clot that had a blackish sheen. It reminded Remus of a raw liver.

"I'm fine," Adrian assured, voice nasally and wet. His lips were scarlet. "It happens."

"Often?" Remus asked concerned, "I didn't know you had a predisposition for nosebleeds."

Adrian rolled his shoulder, then after a slight pause he leant slightly sideways, leaning into Remus' hand. Adrian hadn't gone out of his way for physical contact before.

"Where's Lutain?" Remus asked gently, finally taking note of just how painfully bare the room was. Truly there was very little, just the bed, a side table, and the single rickety chair that Sirius had complained about. Adrian must have been going insane from the boredom.

"I don't know." Adrian confessed, his voice higher and contemplating as he blinked twice, "I don't know where he is. I should ask him."

'You can't ask him if he isn't here.' Remus thought to himself, biting his tongue to not say it out loud.

"He doesn't like being with me anyways," Adrian gave a shrug, dismissing the idea coldly even though even *thinking it* must have been painful. "He's been avoiding me."

Remus didn't say anything as he sat down on the bed beside Adrian. The younger leant back, choking wetly as blood continued to dribble. Remus was warm, Adrian slumped against his side.

"Familiar's aren't like that." Remus tried to assure him quietly, "They rely on you and share a connection."

Adrian gave a small noise, something between a hum and a scoff. "I don't think he's my familiar. He's mine though. He's *mine."*

Remus crossed his arms, thinking over how Sirius had *demanded* he not take his wand into the room with him. He could have at least spared bringing a tissue with him.

"Muggles used to think that familiars were demons, forced to obey a witch. They would take the form of animals, and wouldn't hesitate for any wish of their master." Remus mused quietly with a small smile on his face, "Of course, that isn't right. They say that our magic finds an animal, one that we imprint on as much as they imprint on us. Due to this, our cores align and they become an extension of ourselves."

Adrian blinked lazily, "What is our core?"

Remus hummed quietly, noticing as the tension left Adrian slowly the longer he talked, "That's magical theory. To be honest, when I was your age I hated magical theory."

Adrian's nose made a gross high pitched whine, the breaking of pressure. A blood clot bubbled and dribbled down his face like a slug. Thankfully, the worst bit seemed to have passed.

"We refer to our magical core as our reserves, or our magical capabilities." Remus explained, using one hand to try and convey his words clearer, "Imagine a lake, or a sea of our capabilities. In the past, we used to believe that our reserves were similar to a tree, and our magical casting abilities were like the branches that stemmed out from our center. We know that's not entirely true now, and instead we imagine our core as a pool."

Adrian fumbled with his shirt, running the fabric between his fingers leisurely, "And when we cast spells?"

Remus chuckled softly, the vibrations and movements shifting Adrian slightly from where he rested. "It's always up for interpretation. The widely accepted explanation is that we have a system of pathways that generally aren't in use. When we use our magic, our reserves release our capabilities down these pathways to meet with our wand where it is used as a conduit for our magic."

"Like a stream." Adrian simplified quietly, "Our magic is a lake and flows through us like mountain rivers and streams, breaking into thousands of tributaries throughout our body."

Remus smiled and nodded, his face tickled by Adrian's hair, "With that model, we've explained accidental magic as a flash flood- an uncontrollable surplus down one of these pathways. Thankfully, by having so many different paths we're able to ensure more control over our magic."

Adrian hummed quietly, "What are the other models?"

"Generally they all have the same principle, that our core and our conduits are two separate systems. Some people or educational system refer to it as more of a...a nervous system, in Muggle terms. Others think of it more as a heart, supplying our bodies with a near constant stream of magic we are able to redirect when performing feats. The pathways; rivers, veins, nerves, however you interpret it, are almost unanimously thought to be our embodiment of our soul."

Adrian's heart beat quickly, thrumming repeatedly with a calming mantra. "And soul magic? Like the patronus?"

Remus hummed once again, "I presume that magic relies on the utilization of those pathways. Less the reserves or the capabilities of your core itself, but the passages by which it travels. It must be why the patronus is infamous as such a difficult spell."

Adrian tasted blood, and felt it crumble into a gritty dust from where it caked to the fine hairs lining his face. The hairs had appeared quite randomly, softening his jawline with the presence of the peach fuzz. It was strange to see, the hairs had given him a fuzzy downy appearance that contrasted sharply with the sickly pallor of his skin. The dried blood made it look like he had been attacked, his shirt was nearly black in a downwards triangle towards his naval.

"Has your nosebleed stopped?" Remus inquired, unable to see Adrian's face as the back of the younger's skull rested on the werewolf's side. Adrian nodded, yawning bored.

"They happen," He shrugged, dismissing it just as he had done earlier, "Whenever I cast magic."

Remus stiffened, "That doesn't sound healthy."

Adrian laughed, a self deprecating noise that Remus felt sad to hear. It was all too easy to relate to.

"The first time my nose bled I didn't know it was because of that." Adrian admitted fondly, as if it was a good memory, "Ron Weasley punched me in the face so I thought it was from that."

"*What?"* Remus blinked in surprise, nearly jostling the younger from where he was plastered to his side, "When was this?"

"I set the train on fire." Adrian nearly laughed, "I remember being so confused afterwards. I didn't mean for that to happen, I only wanted Draco to burn."

"You shouldn't want *anyone* to burn." Remus scolded without much heat.

"Draco was annoying. He deserved it."

Remus didn't know how to respond to that.

"I think if I tried to set a wall on fire, the entire house would be alight." Adrian confessed quietly, finally for the first time that night, showed worry.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't have a frame of reference anymore." Adrian struggled to convey, "If you were to spell *lumos,* would your spell be brighter than a first year?"

"Only because I have had practice, and I understand magic more astute than a first year." Remus professed.

Adrian craned his head back, sliding down Remus' side until his head rested against the man's

thigh. Adrian blinked twice, he had long eyelashes and hollows below his cheeks. He looked emaciated.

"I think If I tried *lumos* right now," Adrian whispered, his voice a raspy thing, "This room would glow as if filled with many lanterns."

"That's a very boastful claim." Remus smiled down at the child (a child no longer). "I don't doubt it. You were very powerful when I had you as a student."

Adrian's face pinched as if what Remus sad was something finicky at best. "That was before. I'm better now. I think I could beat Bellatrix now, I could explode a dozen birds until they *painted* her." Adrian paused, then lamely added, "At *one time."*

Remus had grown used to Adrian's macabre history. His fascination in what would be considered cruel or unsettling now was simply an endearing quality of his individuality. Of course, Sirius had been whining and cursing under his breath all day about how unnerving Adrian was, but Remus had long since learned when his words were something to ignore or something to address.

This was something to address.

"I didn't know you knew a spell to rupture birds. I don't know a spell like that." Remus carefully commented. His left hand rising to run very gently through Adrian's hair. It was nearly slimy with the amount of grease in it. The ends had split so aggressively the knots looked as if he'd have to cut them out.

"Rumpervis." Adrian whispered reverently, fingers twitching as he stated the spell almost with adoration, "It was...breathtaking."

Remus didn't know that spell, but he could tell by the tone of voice that it most certainly was dark magic.

"I've never been one for attacking spells." Remus admitted calmly, "That was more of Sirius' or James' expertise. I know defensive spells, shielding spells."

Adrian's face lit up as if delighted, "How did you learn to shield?"

"James learned first," Remus smiled at the memory, "He and Sirius were trying to learn how to do it, they spent a weekend shooting stinging hexes at one another. I think others thought we were daft."

Adrian laughed at the idea, small almost soundless giggles that revealed his teeth. They were pink.

"I kept mispronouncing the spell." Adrian confessed sheepishly, "I got in trouble for dodging so I spent an entire day learning the spell."

Remus ruffled Adrian's hair with a small smile, "I could spend hours of telling you my magical disasters."

Adrian grinned looking delighted, "Likewise. I'm bad with fire- *well,* I'm not...*bad."*

Adrian contemplated the topic with a small scrunch of his eyebrows, "No, no I'm really good at fire. *That's* the problem."

Remus didn't say anything but continued to gently tug at the knots in Adrian's hair. They weren't coming loose.

Adrian lolled his head around, stretching his legs out like a content cat, "You should stay here."

Remus smiled and with a sick ripping noise, removed a nasty knot. "I'm not. You're my primary concern for now."

Adrian frowned, "No. I mean you should stay with me. I could take you with me, and you wouldn't have to do this anymore."

Remus' hand stilled, and suddenly Adrian's wide eyes didn't seem so nonthreatening. Obviously the younger didn't understand what he was implying, or what he was saying in his uncharacteristic childish reasoning. Remus had heard that Adrian had been delirious, somehow inebriated but he seemed quite logical now. If not for this childish reasoning, this very strange childish reasoning.

(And the fact he was very obviously touch starved, but that was another concern for a later time.)

"I can't just leave people behind here." Remus explained gently, "I have people here, Adrian."

Adrian's face clouded in confusion, as if the notion was crazy to think of. "Tonks? I know you like her. She's loud, she's been nice to me."

Remus tensed and once more he was unsettled by the strange knowledge Adrian had of things he shouldn't know, "Tonks and I are very close."

"Oh," Adrian blinked, tilting his head in thought, "I could take her with me. I could mark you, and you would be untouchable. I don't know if you could boss them around, but wouldn't they be scared of a werewolf?"

Remus wasn't following, but he was intelligent enough to form some horrifying conclusions on his own. Where had Adrian gotten the idea of a *mark?* "I don't like the idea of a mark, Adrian."

Adrian grinned, eyes burning like a fire. His eyes were different, the heterochromia was startling and very recent. The yellow looked sickly, like old pus seeping from his pupil into the color of his iris, "You don't have to always have it! I could make it secret, oh but you can't speak to it. That would be difficult. Maybe link it to a keyword? It would have to be intelligent."

"I don't think something like that exists, Adrian." Remus soothed once again.

Adrian prickled, twitching as if he wanted to pull away from Remus' lap, but he couldn't in fear of losing the touch. "It does."

Adrian stilled, pausing as if in thought. He looked at Remus with half lidded eyes, the yellow far too bright to be anything but alarming. "Do you like me, Remus?"

Remus felt as if he was mourning for the loss of something gone, which was impossible. Adrian was right *there,* but he felt so far away. He felt as if he had changed truly, as if something hideous had condemned him to something so foul, he had accepted it.

"Of course I do," Remus spoke, voice strained and distorted through his distress, "Adrian, you *know* I do. Why would you ever think I wouldn't?"

Adrian's half lidded eyes blinked slowly, and then twisted with something challenging.

'Do you really?' Adrian silently seemed to ask, dangerous yet *screaming* for confirmation, as if Remus' mind would never change.

Then Adrian's neck darkened, looking almost bruised before it *moved.*

"Oh *Adrian."* Remus whispered, feeling as if he was going to cry.

Remus had seen the pictures, he had even seen one in person before. It wasn't a dark mark, but the concept behind it was identical. It looked like the snake from the mark, although normally being so tiny had the details impossible to see.

This one...this one was a bold black statement that stained Adrian's skin.

'Do you still, Remus? Do you still like me?' Adrian seemed to challenge in the small quirk of his lips, tinted red and cracked in the corners.

"Merlin's Beard." Remus whispered, and then he blinked and he was crying.

"Isn't she beautiful?" Adrian asked cooing as he craned his neck to see the thick coils imprinted on his flesh lower until it snuck below his collarbone. Adrian reached down, prying the hem of his shirt up to where his ribs protruded like spider legs. The snake was moving, trailing and twisting over his sunken abdomen with the vibrancy of a bruise.

It was massive, vicious and angry looking as it trailed over his hip bone and below the edge of his trousers.

"I could get you one too," Adrian sighed relaxed, releasing his shirt to sprawl more leisurely across the bed, careful to remain touching Remus. "I could get you a beautiful one. Nobody would touch you again."

'I could make you untouchable, Remus.'

Remus' hands were shaking slightly, trembling almost unnoticeable. "I don't think that's a good idea, Adrian."

Adrian pouted with a huff, "I could hide it for you."

'It could be our secret.'

"I'm...I'm not comfortable with the idea of being branded." Remus sounded pained, "I don't like you being branded."

Adrian shrugged, "It doesn't hurt."

"Did you ask for it?"

Adrian paused, a second that stretched long enough it was easy for the surprise to be felt. Adrian looked uncomfortable, and by then it was far too long for any answer to be taken lightly.

"Bellatrix got it for me." Adrian deflected, although it sounded slightly unsure and limp.

"Do you like it?" Remus asked calmly, taking every precaution to not come across too strong or sharp, "It looks like it would be uncomfortable."

Adrian was quiet. Remus understood, how Adrian decided to direct the conversation was how they would continue the topic.

Adrian looked torn, and he curled up slightly, nearly fetal. His head was heavy on Remus' lap, his breaths looked far too laborious. The childish immaturity faded, he looked far too tired for

someone his age.

"It itches. Like when food dries on your arm and you have to peel it away."

Remus hummed encouragingly, and Adrian curled in on himself slightly more, "...It's big."

"It looked quite large."

"It is. I didn't want it to be that big. I can feel it."

Adrian paused, his breathing stilling. Remus patiently waited whatever Adrian was to say- judging by his body language it was something quite personal Adrian hadn't ever admitted before. "It...It talks to me a lot. When I don't want it to."

Remus resumed the gentle brushing of Adrian's hair. The poor boy looked exhausted, as if the simple confession took everything out of him. "How about you shower? Or bathe if you'd like. Tonks told me to bring some of her bath potions, apparently they'll make your skin feel soft."

Adrian's face twisted slightly in confusion, "W- *why?"*

'Why are you still being nice to me?'

Remus smiled gently, "Frankly, you stink. I tried the bath potions once and honestly I haven't looked back once."

"R-*really?"*

Remus nodded playfully, "How about I help you up, Pup."

Adrian stared at him, eyes searching with the strange new acidic band around the black center. A starburst that Remus knew wasn't there before. He was worried, what possibly could have caused that? Perhaps he should ask Adrian if he knew anything about it later, but not now. Not when the child looked ready to fall to pieces.

"Okay." Adrian's voice was small. Cracking and tiny, *vulnerable,* "A bath?"

Remus very slowly shifted himself, carefully adjusting his right arm to prop the younger off his lap and into a more seated position. Remus stood, turning with both hands out to help assist the younger into a standing position.

Adrian's skin was anemic, the bags below his eyes were purpling. Adrian stood, grasping Remus' arms to hoist himself up- the bones of his wrist were far too prominent.

"I'll make sure the water isn't too hot," Remus assured the younger, pausing a second before he tugged off the blanket to wrap around the younger. The blanket was grey, yet it looked so much darker against Adrian's pale flesh.

"I feel gross." Adrian whispered, his voice a high pitched whine with a slight wobble to it.

"That's okay," Remus assured, opening the door and keeping it open as Adrian shuffled out of the room for likely the first time in weeks, "I'll try my best to make you feel better."

Remus thankfully didn't acknowledge when Adrian choked.

The potion made the water soft, the same way Hedwig's feathers felt when Adrian stroked her

back. The water was pink, a pleasing shade just shy of bubblegum, and smelled sweet and gentle in a way Adrian couldn't explain.

Remus helped him into the water, offering to leave but understanding without Adrian vocalizing anything that he really didn't want that. Remus had a rag, and helped clean the flaking blood from his skin like a rough tongue.

The water had bubbles, thick frothy bubbles that threatened to spill over the edge of the moderately sized tubs. These too, were pink.

"Is this a thing people do?" Adrian asked, hanging his head and curling his shoulders slightly. The water reached the middle of his rib cage, but he looked so terribly exposed.

Remus didn't pause with his movements, knowing that the gentle touch was relaxing. "I suppose. I'm not really the best with children."

Adrian gave a small huff, curling in slightly more, "What about Tonks?"

Remus didn't slow his movements, "What about her? She is a wonderful woman."

"I saw her before coming here, when they took my wand. I know that you're with her."

Remus, through the might of Merlin himself, didn't stop scrubbing. Adrian had mentioned Tonks before, that he knew about the two of them. If he was bringing it up again, then it certainly was an important thought that had circled in his head for a while.

Remus decided to take the safer route. "I always wondered how you knew things like that. I looked into it a bit, I hope you aren't offended."

Adrian looked over his shoulder with a strangely perplexed expression, "I- offended?"

Remus gave a slow nod, "It's normal to feel offended if people invade your privacy. I though you may be upset that I looked into it."

The corner of Adrian's eyes lifted slightly, his face tightening into a slightly more pinched expression. "I- I'm not? I mean, I've always had my things shared or looked through and I don't- Why would I be offended for you researching?"

That was a concerning thought, that the basic human decency of privacy was foreign to Adrian. Remus felt a pang of guilt- it likely hadn't helped that Adrian's things were periodically checked over when he stayed at order headquarters.

"Are you a legilimens?"

Adrian looked so *perplexed*, "I- are you asking me?"

Remus smiled slightly, "Well, you could lie but I'd appreciate if you were honest with me."

Adrian was so baffled with the exchange, he found himself ducking his head down behind a curtain of his wet hair. "I- yes. I'm a legilimens."

Remus carefully controlled the smile that almost twitched across his face. "You scared Sirius, I think he thought you could somehow see spirits or something else."

Adrian's torso shook with repressed laughter, "That would be ridiculous."

"Ah, sometimes Sirius is a bit silly I'd agree. Could you close your eyes?"

Adrian followed his direction, tensing slightly but accepting the water that was poured over his hair with a borrowed mug from the kitchen.

"I know why you have these bath potions, and why you're with her so much." Adrian spoke flatly, but not coldly. Monotone, dull and blunt like a metal butter knife. Not sharp enough to tear, but the implications clear.

"I wouldn't lie to you," Remus soothed, ignoring how Adrian flinched as the man used a comb and small scissors to clip loose the worst knots. "Tonks and I are close."

"Are you going to leave me too?"

Adrian's voice was quiet, filled with longing and already expecting the worst.

"No, I'm not." Remus confided with the smallest *shlk shlk* of his scissors, mangled black locks drifted to the pink bath water. "Tonks brought up moving your belongings to her house, I think she has all of your claws and teeth in your bedroom in her cottage."

Shlk shlk, more hair fell.

"...my things a-are at her house?"

"Our house," Remus corrected with a tranquil peace to his voice, "Once things calm down. Tonks has been running herself ragged trying to find out what sort of heating charm would work with Lutain, there's not much published on snakes surprisingly."

Adrian curled down, a small weakened ball surrounded by bubbles and saccharine aroma. He was shaking under Remus' hand, each vertebrae pronounced like turrets on castles.

"I have the certification necessary to teach, although the Ministry made sure I won't be hired," Remus sighed wistfully, not sounding too devastated by the discrimination. "It wouldn't be hard to have you caught up on school work at your own speed, maybe we could try to fix the broken garden shed into a little Care for Magical Creatures room for you. Within reason of course."

Adrian was making horrible noises, gasping wretched inhales of breath that would have alarmed Remus before.

"Did Skylar ever have this?" Adrian asked, voice slurred and wet and sounding so undignified Remus was partially surprised he spoke at all.

Did you ever treat Skylar like this?

"Well, I presume at some point in his life he may have experienced a bubble bath," Remus confessed, nonplussed by Adrian's state. "In truth, I couldn't imagine inviting that child into my home. Skylar is a wonderful boy, but he isn't mine."

Adrian made a noise, a hoarse twisted whisper that was impossible to hear. Remus didn't need to, he knew Adrian far too well now to ever doubt what he would say.

And I am? He would ask, voice equal parts scathing and longing.

"In my eyes," Remus began, the carefully inflection lilting his voice just so. "You are far more important to me than Skylar Potter ever will be, So perhaps the real question you should ask, if

you *want* to be?"

'Do you want to be mine?'

Adrian didn't cry prettily, he sobbed like something monstrous.

There was a saying, that the more you trusted the more likely you were to be hurt.

Skylar knew that, he tended to wear his heart on his sleeve. He made friends more than enemies. He would help before hurting others. He would talk, before cursing.

He was in a bind, he was forced into a corner with Lutain his only opportunity out. He was diplomatic, he was kind, Skylar was a *hero.*

He wasn't going to stand aside and watch someone be hurt on his behalf.

So he talked, even when he wasn't asked to. He would talk long into the night in low murmurs with Lutain curled on his chest. He told the snake of meaningless things, of flowers and sunsets and quidditch. He would talk until his eyelids were heavy and his throat abrasive and raw.

(Sometimes he blinked and imagined blood seeping from his nose and mouth and over his chest and filling his lungs.)

Lutain was always there, a low steady rumble. The deep pulsing of the reptile's heart over Skylar's pulse-point.

At times Skylar couldn't even recall simple actions, talking and talking while getting dressed or laying in bed. He felt sore in his bones like a phantom ache and his skin tingles in the strangest patches. Numb and burning, peeling glue from his shoulder and chest and hip.

He found a bird, stunned and disoriented from running into the window. It fluttered weakly, jerking in Skylar's grip. It was beautiful, small and delicate. It's beak was small, suited for picking bugs from the air or hovering over the nearby meadow. It's beady black eyes flickered across Skylar's face, its heart trembled like a pocket watch.

Lutain twisted, coiling over his thigh and hip and over his shoulders caressing his neck.

Skylar opened his mouth, inhaling slowly and feeling saliva pool below his tongue.

Lutain whispered in pictures, thrumming and gentle like another limb. Skylar whispered his heart to the snake, late at night where there was no light to observe his transgressions.

He gave the snake all he had, in hopes that perhaps the trust and admiration would be returned in information, and assistance.

The bird chirped frantically, its little bones wiggling between Skylar's fingers.

Lutain draped around Skylar, around his shoulders and skin and blood and bone and-

It's prey. Lutain susurrated around his neck. *It is a rat.*

It was prey, it was a rat.

Skylar rotated his hand, and wrung the bird's neck.

Newt

Chapter Summary

Where Hermione brings in the cavalry, Skylar bonds with an old soul, and Horcruxes are discussed.

Chapter Notes

Fanart is linked in the passages, as well as at the bottom of the fic.
Enjoy the early chapter!

'Is this your joke. I let you starve, and I'm starving too. I eat and eat and I just keep starving.'

"Are you with Tonks? More than being with her, I mean." Adrian asked quietly, sitting with his legs crossed facing the wall. Remus' hands stilled from where he had been combing through the strands of hair- scissors on the bed between them.

"I know you are," Adrian continued after a pause, "I heard from Luna that I should ask questions instead of saying what I know." Adrian paused once more, thinking hard, "I think it's supposed to make you not panic."

Remus' mouth twitched slightly in amusement as he resumed brushing his hair, "You always seem to know things you shouldn't. Do you read minds a lot?"

Adrian shrugged, a very subtle movement mindful of the scissors near his neck, "Sirius is loud."

"Loud?" Remus hummed, gently clipping away another unsalvageable knot. It truly was taking several sessions to try and fix the messy cluster that was Adrian's hair. Although he had worked on it when wet, now that it had dried it only revealed more problems.

"His head," Adrian clarified quietly, "You were gone. I was worried."

Remus carefully continued moving his hands in calm rhythmic movements, "Legilimency? I heard from Severus about the skill, fairly rare. Many people would consider it intrusive, and very rude."

"Oh," Adrian smartly responded, "...I didn't know where you were."

"That doesn't give you permission to look through the minds of others," Remus chastised gently, "You should apologize to Sirius."

Adrian stiffened, and Remus resumed clipping until the other slowly relaxed from his posture.

"I don't want to." Adrian muttered.

"You should, it would be the right thing to do."

"I thought I was insane." Adrian mused without much emotion, "Disturbed. Psycho. Spastic. Mad. Mental. Thick. Freak." Adrian's body twitched in a small spasm, "*Loony."* he practically hissed out.

Remus breathed through his nose carefully, "Who called that to you?"

"Nobody," Adrian murmured quietly, "Everyone. They think it, everyone does. Selwyn has a few screws loose. Selwyn is a *freak."*

Remus gently set aside the comb and scissors. He ignored the few scraps of hair, and instead slid forward slightly so that his weight was a nearby presence for Adrian.

"That isn't even my *name,"* Adrian whined, shaking across his shoulders, "I- I just want to be *good."*

"You are good, Adrian." Remus assured him, "You're exceptional."

"I'm not," Adrian whispered choked, "I don't know what I'm doing."

Remus shushed him softly, "When I was your age, oh what a mess I was. I had nowhere to go in the world, I had nothing going for me. But you know, I found something along the way. The secret is that you can do whatever you want to do."

Adrian hung his head slightly, tucking his knees to his chest. Remus could count the vertebrae through his shirt, despite the overwhelming amount of food he had ravenously consumed.

"I don't think so." Adrian whispered, barely audible even for Remus' ears, "I think I'm dying."

Remus didn't breathe. He didn't have anything to say.

"Absolute rubbish, all of this." Hermione scowled, storming through the kitchen to throw the prophet against the fridge. It hit, then flopped onto the floor with a satisfying heavy noise.

Ron slowly looked at Skylar, both of the two were seated at the kitchen table enjoying the leftover pasta salad Lily had dropped off the day before. Ron's eyebrows rose slightly and he tilted his head towards Hermione.

Skylar's eyes widened and he shook his head subtly. Ron paled and pointed with his spoon, looking desperate.

Skylar spooned more pasta into his mouth and Ron followed suit until both the boys had cheeks bulging with pasta.

"You know I can *see* you two." Hermione huffed, crossing her arms before snatching the paper off the floor and throwing it onto the table between the two. It was just a normal prophet, the front cover showed its normal shite but no signs of a Death Eater attack or anything else drastic.

"What's wrong with it?" Skylar tentatively asked after painfully shoving the pasta down his throat.

Hermione looked at him exasperated, "Does it not bother you the papers seems *obsessed* with you?"

Ron blinked slowly and squinted at the headliner, '*Of course we can!'*

It was written in bright bold font, under a picture of Dumbledore and Skylar that the prophet had taken after Skylar's victory for the Triwizard Cup. He had seen the picture often, he had his arms crossed and a grimacing snarl across his face- his eyes were pained and furious. Skylar hated the picture of him.

"I don't see what you're talking about," Ron blinked, "It's just the prophet."

Hermione gaped in amazement, "This- this isn't *news.* It's propaganda!"

Skylar looked at Ron, then back at Hermione unsure, "Er...okay?"

Hermione yanked a chair out and sat down heavily. Ron gulped.

"This is wartime propaganda! It's a military and political strategy, by publishing persuasive or accusatory information public opinion is able to be swayed to believe or inspire a specific thought." Hermione sniffed, "Honestly, this wasn't as common in the Wizarding world but World War Two? Propaganda was across the world against Hitler!"

Skylar slid the bowl away from him, silently mourning the few noodles he knew he wouldn't have a chance to eat anymore, "Right, there was some around for Grindelwald but practically everyone already knew that he was bad news. 'Mione these papers are rubbish but they aren't being mean."

Hermione frowned, "That's true, but it...everything seems a bit odd. I mean, you'd think they'd be sprouting things about how awful V-v…" she choked on her own tongue before hurrying along with her sentence, " how terrible you-know-who is, but instead they just keep….saying how great Dumbledore is."

"Well he *is* great." Ron muttered with a shrug, "Probably trying to cover their own arses."

Skylar grimaced slightly, "Yeah 'Mione, my dad was muttering about it too. I think that the papers want to keep most bits about the Death Eaters out just in case something happens, protect themselves, you know?"

Hermione huffed, "I don't like it. They're putting you on a pedestal Sky! This- this paper here was claiming that you're able to vanquish Death Eaters with one spell!"

Skylar's nose wrinkled, "It makes people feel better, Hermione."

"It's rubbish!"

"It helps people be able to go outside." Skylar quietly soothed, "I *don't* like it, I don't. I'm...I'm not some sort of hero, or..or the only one able to..to k-*kill* Voldemort." Skylar choked but continued with a miserable look, "but 'Mione if it helps...if it helps Madam Rosmerta open up The Three Broomsticks every day instead of closing it, or if it helps Florean Fortescue sell ice cream without being so scared that Diagon's going to be attacked then I'm *fine* with being something I'm not."

Hermione looked like she had been struck, "Sky…"

"No, no listen to me." Skylar stressed, "Hermione all around the country people think the name 'Skylar Potter' and you know what they think? They think *'oh! The boy-who-lived! The boy who survived something impossible!'* and you know what, when people are given miracles then it gives them *hope,* that *maybe*, somehow *they* can have that same sort of miracle. I'm not special, Mione. I'm just a kid who likes Quidditch, but for almost everyone else I'm a symbol of hope, and right now if the prophet wants to blow me up so I'm the next Merlin, fine. I don't *like it,* I don't like being something I'm not."

Skylar's eyes were glassy, his lips were trembling slightly and with a pang of horror, Hermione and Ron realized he was on the point of tears.

"I've been praised and worshiped for something I had no control of, for something I have no memory of. Every tragedy, every time I've *suffered,* people have celebrated because I'm some- I'm some sort of *weapon*...and *I don't want to be."* Skylar's voice cracked with a whine, "I'm not a hero, I'm not some… some sort of great wizard. I'm just a kid, and I'm *afraid*...I'm afraid that I'm going to end up a martyr for something I don't believe in."

Hermione rightfully looked guilty, Ron looked like he had been struck but had a strange sense of understanding.

"You know, mate." Ron started with a small shrug, "the thing about growing up with Fred and George, and Percy and Charlie, is that you sort of start thinking anything's possible if you've got enough nerve."

Skylar gave a shallow laugh, a small smile despite the fact he was shaking where he sat, "Ron, Ron you know that's not true mate. I..I'm supposed to stop him and-"

Ron breathed through his nose loudly and looked very tired, "You're talking about Ginny."

Skylar snapped his mouth shut.

"You know, I used to think I knew a lot about death and dying and all that." Ron's face was unreadable, "but it's bollocks. We know what death's like once we watch it happen. And it isn't...it's sick. It's a twisted thing."

Skylar nodded, "I don't think I can k-kill…" Skylar's words broke off with a hitch of his voice, "...Guys I'm supposed to save the world and *I can't-"*

"You're not doing any of this alone." Hermione interrupted, "Skylar Potter you're an idiot if you think we're leaving you."

Skylar smiled breathlessly, "I can't ask you-"

"Good, because we're not asking." Ron agreed. "Don't think we haven't noticed how you've been keeping things from us, mate. It'll drag you down."

Skylar shook his head, "No, no guys I can't. I can't ask this from you. Hermione, you...Ron, I...your sister-"

"That wasn't your fault." Ron swallowed painfully, "It took me a while too, but...but it wasn't Selwyn's fault either."

Skylar flinched back in surprise. Hermione's jaw dropped in amazement.

"I… let me say this, because I don't think I'll ever do it if I don't say it now." Ron blurted before inhaling and exhaling shakily, "I...I don't know. I've been...I've been thinking a lot about Selwyn. Like...like *a lot.* You ah, you remember when he was here and ah, and we got in a spat about Ginny. Selwyn...I dunno, he had *this look,* and I thought about it for years. He just had this one look on his face right before he dropped, sent us in a panic."

"Yeah, I remember that." Skylar hoarsely agreed, nodding slightly.

"Yeah well, I don't know if you know it Sky, but you've been havin' the exact same face after

Cedric. And after Luna."

Skylar made a small choking noise, Ron determedly didn't look at him. "I thought about it so long, for *so long,* that I think it's scrambled and gnarled worse than...I don't know. I just...I talked to Remus a bit. I didn't understand why he was around the bloody git, and just...I dunno." Ron shrugged, his voice going even quieter, "I always thought of 'abuse' and 'ill' like those kneazles and featherless owls you see on those posters, with those auror's floo number under it. Shaking little things that flinch if you talk too loud and stuff. I didn't really...I didn't really ever *think* of Selwyn like that but at the same time I *knew,* and...and I *know* how scrambled your head gets after spells and potions- Sirius told me that Bellatrix Lestrange had a pet cat when she was a kid, bloody loved the thing."

He paused in his monologue, the ticking of the clock echoed through the room to mark the passage of time.

"I think the point is that I forgive the git," Ron confessed so quiet it was almost a whisper, "because I sure do still hate him, and I hate what he *did,* but I feel sorry for him more than anything. I feel sorry for the bloke, because the more we know the more sad I am that someone like him even exists. Doesn't mean he isn't going to pay, just...I dunno, he'll pay for the other stuff he's done. He'll get a trial and all that rubbish and it'll be *fair.* But...Ginny wasn't fair, I don't think he wanted to."

Hermione had started crying at some point, although exactly when was unknown. She had always felt that way about Adrian, she hadn't known that Ron had thought about it like that.

"I want to try and help him," Ron winced with a grimace, "but...but at the same time I want to bloody smash his face in."

"Yeah, I know the feeling." Skylar gave a small bubble of laughter, which made Ron's face twitch into a slight smile.

Hermione threw herself at Ron, nearly tackling him out of the chair as her arms wrapped around his neck.

Skylar thought he had to do it alone, but he was quickly realizing that he didn't have to. He didn't *need* to be the savior, he didn't need to walk down the path with only Dumbledore guiding him.

"There's more." Skylar spoke, "About everything."

The two looked at him in confusion, before a well hidden look of excitement. Skylar had been incredibly tight lipped about what he and Dumbledore had been discussing, even his parents had been left in the dark much to their frustration.

"You can't tell my parents," Skylar explained quietly, "I swore to Professor Dumbledore I wouldn't tell them."

"Blimey, it must be serious." Ron muttered in awe, nodding furiously in agreement.

"Hermione, have you ever heard of something called Horcruxes?"

She frowned, "Horcruxes...Horcruxes...I've never heard of them."

"You haven't?" Ron gaped in surprise. Skylar instead nodded, expecting that.

"A horcrux is...Dumbledore told me it's incredibly dark magic. I mean...I mean *dark,* some of the darkest that exists." Skylar felt like his explanation was lacking, "It's foul. Against nature itself."

Hermione and Ron shared a grim look before nodding for Skylar to continue.

"A horcrux is...it's an object or a thing that contains a broken chunk of your soul."

Ron flinched back with a gasp, "Your- your *soul?"*

Hermione blinked in confusion but thankfully clued in that it was terribly bad news.

"It- by breaking your soul and hiding it in an object, it means that even if your body is damaged, even if you're *killed,* you're still alive. Your broken part makes sure you're still alive."

Hermione inhaled with a sharp horrified gasp, "You-Know-Who has one of these?"

Skylar shrunk in on himself, "Dumbledore said that...he said that there wasn't a book that could give this information. That apparently it was so dark that...that people wouldn't even *write* about it. Dumbledore thinks, that Voldemort was expecting the threat of death many times, but no wizard has ever done more than tear his soul in two."

Ron's hand twitched into a fist, "Skylar…"

"Dumbledore thinks that Voldemort made seven Horcruxes."

Hermione recoiled with a strangled noise of horror. "But- but they could be anywhere in the world! Hidden, or spelled, or invisible or *buried!"*

"No, Dumbledore thinks that they'd be something special." Skylar shook his head.

"Yeah, he's right." Ron agreed, pausing while the two stared at him, "I mean, You-Know-Who is all about pureblood culture, right? Well, I mean technically my family is pureblood so I know all about that. Those blokes are all about heirlooms and trinkets, jewelry and fine china and stuff they can show off."

Skylar smiled, a small grin creeping across his face, "You see the ring on Dumbledore's hand?"

Hermione gasped in horror, "The one that looks so sick? *That's* a Horcrux?"

"A house ring?" Ron squinted in thought, "Purebloods have house rings that are for their bloodline or something. I think Bill has ours, never really cared much for tradition though."

Hermione smiled and nodded slowly, "Then...then there are six more? Heirlooms?"

"Five, apparently he's got a piece still in him. Dumbledore and I have a theory that Voldemort went after relics, before he knew his bloodline." Skylar enthused quietly, "Relics from the-"

"The founders!" Hermione's eyes widened, "Of course! I thought relics from the founders had been lost to history though?"

Ron scratched his chin with a frown, "I don't know, I'd reckon they'd be passed down some family or given to a collector of some sort."

Skylar found himself overwhelmed with pride for his friends. How quickly they believed him, and how quick they were to help. "I already know two of the relics, and Dumbledore assures me that Gryffindor's sword is well hidden."

"A sword?" Ron's eyes practically glittered in awe, "Bloody hell."

"Which relics? Hufflepuff's bracelet is on display in a goblin run museum."

Skylar shook his head, "Hufflepuff's cup, and Slytherin's locket."

Hermione paused, eyebrows scrunching as she tapped her jaw, "Assuming he found something of Ravenclaw, that still leaves a fifth and sixth Horcrux."

"Er, yeah," Skylar grimaced, "This is where it gets a bit messy. We ah, we think we already know what the fifth one is."

"I have a feeling this isn't going to be easy." Ron muttered under his breath.

"We think it's his snake, this big python thing named Nagini."

"You-Know-Who's snake?" Hermione said, startled. "You can use animals as Horcruxes?"

"We didn't think so at first, but ah…" Skylar looked uncertain, gnawing on his lower lip, "...you know Lutain?"

Hermione paled. Ron looked confused, "You mean that pissy black rope? That's You-Know-Who's horcrux?"

Skylar twitched, "No, it's Adrian's."

Ron's mouth snapped shut. His eyes bulged and Hermione looked ready to pass out. "Oh," Ron breathed, sounding weak.

"Yeah, oh." Skylar murmured, fiddling with his shirt, "But uh, Lutain doesn't know that he is. I mean, he *knows,* but he doesn't know *what* he is."

"Hold up, the snake actually bloody talks?" Ron gaped.

"It more...it kinda like...sends ideas? Concepts? Feelings? Oh, and uh, occasionally can like make you hear memories or something."

Hermione floundered before she swooned into Ron's side, "That isn't good, Sky."

"I think that Adrian doesn't actually *know* what a Horcrux is." Skylar admitted, "I- I don't really think he *knew* what he was doing."

"The- you don't just *accidently* make a dark ritual!" Ron hissed under his breath, looking on the verge of tearing out his hair.

"No no, he…" Skylar's hands flexed into claws, "He made the snake into one because the snake is- it's *normal."*

"Lutain had a normal lifespan, and was going to die." said Hermione.

"Oh," Ron blinked and looked downcast, "Now I really feel bad for the bloke."

"Won't Lutain be bad? Skylar- he's...he's a *dark artifact now!"*

Skylar winced, "He...I *think,* that...that Lutain somehow has...has some of Adrian in him now."

Ron snorted, "What part of *splitting your soul* did you not hear?"

Skylar's mouth twitched, "I mean I think Lutain has some of his memories, or...his knowledge."

Hermione sat back in her chair, looking fascinated against her grudging frown, "There hasn't ever been a recorded way to pass knowledge from one to another, except through possession but that still isn't quite…"

"Okay wait, I'm lost on something," Ron smacked his palm on the table between them lightly, "You said that you don't think Selwyn knew what he was doing? So how did he find out about whatever this Horycox is."

Skylar leant back in his chair with a small sigh, "Well...that's the thing. You remember the basilisk?"

Hermione gasped, "You said...you said it wasn't in any *book,* but the basilisk...Skylar how old is that basilisk?"

Skylar felt like his mind had been hit with a stinging hex. Everything he knew suddenly clicked into place with a cold realization.

"I..I told Lutain that I'd kill the basilisk." Skylar wheezed out as if he had been punched, "We...we made a *deal."*

"Bloody Selwyn and bloody deals." Ron huffed, "I mean, how are *we* supposed to take on that...you *saw* how big that thing was! It- It *killed Lun-"*

He cut off abruptly and stared furiously at the table. The clock was ticking again.

"He's right," Hermione murmured, "It's...it's unrealistic...to take on a basilisk that's been alive for *centuries."*

Skylar's mouth twitched, "We aren't Selwyn."

Hermione laughed, a sudden startled noise that sent Ron into quiet guffaws. The air seemed to shift from sombre to determined.

"Alright," Hermione nodded with a firm look on her face, "Skylar, you worry about these Horcruxes with Professor Dumbledore. We'll handle the basilisk."

Ron spluttered, "Excuse me? *We?"*

Hermione rolled her eyes, "Yes Ronald, we're handling the basilisk."

Ron blinked in surprise and resignation, "'Mione, you're the most brilliant witch of our age but even *you* can't take on a bloody basilisk."

Hermione sniffed, "I know that. I'm calling in an expert."

Although the Order of the Phoenix meetings were still going on, Skylar was rarely actually in the same location. He spent a large proportion of his time at the Burrow, before jumping to small private cottages or even to Charlie's shack of a house he was renting for the summer.

Skylar's parents were coming and going, although at no point did they ignore him. They had taken great care to message him, either through notes scrawled on parchment sent through a portkey or in

plain sight before his arrival at his temporary dwelling. Sirius had felt bad, so he slipped him a mirror that allowed Skylar to smile and wave to his father late at night when Ron and Hermione had long since fallen asleep.

Death Eater activity was increasing, so his father was busy helping out and preventing damage. Kingsley (the new Minister after Fudge's public resignation) was sending auror forces to help, politely assisting the Order through the political filter.

His mum was working by jumping to the first year muggleborn students, explaining carefully to the parents the problems and why they wouldn't be accepted into Hogwarts for the next year. Apparently some of the meetings were incredibly vocal, often Lily left feeling more distraught than happy. Skylar understood completely, and just as he understood why his parents were so busy, they understood why they couldn't prevent him from communicating with Dumbledore.

They tried, and they sheltered him enough and got into enough arguments with Dumbledore and Sirius, but in the end they couldn't hold him back.

The fight was bad, and involved a fair bit of screaming on Skylar's part.

("It isn't *fair* that people die for me!" "That's how the world is, Skylar!" "No! That's how *you* are!")

It was painful. Remus had been called in, looking exhausted and worn but patient and understanding as Skylar cried his guts out.

Remus was too understanding, he was too empathetic and too kind of a man.

Skylar was shuffled back to the Burrow, practically living out of his trunk at this point. Crookshanks nearly clawed through his sock, not happy that he had returned. Sirius gave a bark (which Skylar would never get used to coming out of his human form) and sent the kneezle running.

"I'll never like that cat," Sirius sniffed, "Here I thought we had an agreement. I gave you half of my dinner, you *thief!"*

He shouted up the stairs, shaking a fist angrily in the air. Crookshanks peered back from the second floor, hissing spitefully.

Skylar smiled thinly before he unhooked his trunk, letting the spitting angry black snake fly out of the box and into freedom.

Sirius grimaced at the snake, but didn't say anything.

(Nobody did anymore. Ron and Hermione still stared at it in slight fear, Slughorn and Dumbledore looked resigned at the sight. Skylar couldn't imagine life without it anymore.)

Crookshanks must have managed its way into Hermione's room, because only a short while after her head popped over the edge along with a neon pink afro.

"Wotcher Sky!" Tonks cheered down, wiggling her eyebrows happily. Skylar beamed, he hadn't seen Tonks in *months.*

"Hey!" Skylar waved with a grin, "You my house arrest officer?"

Tonks laughed before she changed her hair to something buzz cut and boring grey. For effect, a bushy stereotypical mustache burst across her face- it looked terrible.

Sirius cackled, throwing his head back, nearly crying at the sight.

"Ron stepped out with Fred and George," Hermione explained when the redhead never appeared, "He's uh, helping with supplies."

Skylar arched his eyebrows. Hermione flushed and looked away quickly- obviously a lie.

"Right well," Sirius rolled his shoulders, "A storms coming in tonight, mind helping me outside moving the chairs?"

Skylar peered out the window, pouting when he spotted the makings of a recent bonfire, "You all are terrible."

It was late that night that the door banged open and a loud rustle of hushed voices were heard downstairs.

Skylar leapt to his feet, snatching his wand hurriedly off the side table and rushing towards the door. He struggled to open it, hefting it aside just as something cold and scaly attached itself to his leg and soon after; his shoulder.

He hurried out to the main stairwell, exchanging glances with Hermione and a surprisingly steely eyed Tonks. The later swept down the stairwell ahead of the two, holding her wand in a well practiced dueling position.

Crookshanks took off down the stairs, nearly tripping them. A half second later Tonks smoothly stepped to the side and allowed a shapeless black mass to barrel down the steps- Sirius.

A second later a loud bang, noises, and complains were heard.

"Well I- Ronald!" Hermione nearly shrieked, a flush on her cheeks. Ron, as well as Fred and George were sheepishly plastered to the far wall. Fred's shoulder was smooshed against one portrait, the occupant was trying to beat him off with a broom.

"Well," someone else said from the doorway, flicking a wand to illuminate the lights, "Nice to see you guys too."

"Charlie!" Tonks greeted, shifting her hair back to pink from its previously black shade (to help disguise her in the dark supposedly.)

"Charlie, I thought you were out trying to find an escaped Wyvern?" Sirius gaped, before he paused and slowly looked at Hermione.

Hermione tried to look inconspicuous, if not for the fire red blush on her face.

"A *wyvern?"* someone else murmured, almost sounding disappointed. "So...overrated. I'm almost offended."

Charlie ducked his head to try and stifle a chuckle.

It was someone new, someone that Sirius had never seen before. Tonks hadn't either, although both were politely keeping their wands low.

"Pleasure to meet you all," The newcomer grinned, hobbling in with a slight limp in his one leg. His face was weathered, but kind and energetic in a youthful way, "Which one here is Hermione?"

"Er, that's me." Hermione squeaked, raising one hand. The man's eyes lightened even further. He opened his mouth to say something, before he spotted the interested kneazle weaving between the group.

"Oh hello there," He cooed to the little demon, "Oh, you're gorgeous aren't you. You look just like my Milly."

Crookshanks sat and looked at him thoroughly unimpressed.

"That's Crookshanks," Hermione squeaked out, still flushing.

"Well hello there Crookshanks," the man greeted politely, and then respectfully lowered himself to the ground on ancient legs to reach out politely. Crookshanks looked at the hand, contemplated, then brushed itself against the outstretched fingers before walking off to sniff Ron's shoe.

Hermione looked delighted.

"Whoa," Tonks breathed in surprise, "I didn't know that thing liked *anyone."*

Sirius blinked rapidly, as if he couldn't comprehend what had happened.

"Apologies," The man apologized awkwardly, "Just...you know," he paused before lamely waving towards Crookshanks, "Kneazle."

Hermione nodded understandingly.

"Uh, hi?" Skylar offered, taking a step out and around from Tonks, mindful of his plain sleeping clothing, "It's a pleasure to meet you."

The old man- for that's what he was, smiled back. His face had dimples, and long creases around the corners of his eyes as if he had laughed or smiled most of his life.

"Oh!" The man blinked, recognizing Skylar easily- likely from his pictures all throughout the post, "Hi there. Sorry I didn't see you there. Anyways, is there anywhere I can sit? Awful rainy out, you'd be amazed at how it makes my elbows creek."

That was...a disappointing reaction.

"That's it?" Sirius blinked, feeling just as confused with everything, "I- Charlie who is this?"

"Oh! Right!" the man apologized, setting his bag down before he wrung his fingers and held out a hand awkwardly, "Uh, call me Newt. Sorry, I don't do introductions much. Or people."

Sirius and Tonks looked at Hermione, who looked on the verge of leaping at the man in excitement.

"Wait," Skylar thought quickly, "*Wait."*

Hermione looked sheepish as Skylar looked at her in disbelief, "*This* is how you're going to fix that problem!"

Hermione crossed her arms defensively, "Well honestly Skylar, even *you* said I couldn't stop it myself!"

"That was me actually." Ron blurted, wiggling from where he and the twins were still stuck to the wall, "Can you let us down?"

"Oops," Tonks hummed then with a mischievous glint in her eye, nullified the spell and sent the three rapidly floating to the ceiling.

Sirius gave a single bark of laughter before nullifying *that* spell, sending the three crashing to the floor.

"Bloody hell Tonks," Fred whined, rubbing his head with a frown. "Could've taken our eyes out!" George whined in que.

Ron groaned quietly, he had landed on a footstool.

"Right so," Newt cleared his throat, fumbling with his bag awkwardly, "I ah, heard that you had a situation- a rather impressive one if what you implied wasn't you know...*fake.*"

Ron mumbled something into the carpet.

"I'll be honest, I dunno why you're here." Tonks shrugged, "But it's nice to meet you Mr. Newt! I can fancy up a room for you!"

Newt smiled happily, eyes lighting up in a way that could never be faked, "Thank you Ms...?"

"Nymphadora Tonks, at your service!" She smiled, giving a pleasant wink as she twirled and offered one arm."But just call me Tonks!"

Newt looked surprised but delighted at her arm, taking the offered limb gently in his. He reached for his bag before Sirius politely picked it up. Sirius staggered, puffing out a breath in surprise as the bag was apparently very heavy.

"Merlin," Sirius wheezed in surprise, "What do you have in here, a bloody castle?"

"No, ah, that's the other bag." Newt offered sheepishly, "I mean uh, of course not. Those are illegal."

Tonks laughed and Sirius' face twitched into something surprised and delighted. The twins exchanged excited looks, looking very eager.

"Right," Charlie smiled from the doorway, "I'll fly the thestral back then."

"You took a bloody thestral?" Ron gaped, finally rolling off the stool but not yet rising to his feet.

"Oh yes, it was delightful. Haven't ridden one in years." Newt commentated delighted, "Thank you so much for the ride, Charlie. I do hope you'll send through those notes on that Ironbelly!"

"I doubt it's anything you don't know after the Eastern Front incident. but I'll be sure to send through what I've got when I head back." Charlie teasingly shot back, as if he had known the man for a while.

Newt managed to somehow look proud, and embarrassed at the same time. The man was sneaky, and grabbed the heavy bag back from Sirius as if it weighed a twig.

"Wait," Skylar blurted, feeling that everything was moving far too quickly. Tonks twisted and peered around Newt, everyone pausing to look at Skylar quietly. It felt strange to be the center of attention in the Burrow. Lutain tightened slightly, feeling his hesitation.

"I er," Skylar paused trying to think of his phrasing properly, "You're ah, Newton Scamander? The world famous Magizoologist?"

Newt's face twitched slightly, reflecting something oddly familiar to Skylar, "Ah, yes. I don't think world fame suits me well, I'm retired."

Skylar smiled slightly, something Newt seemed to recognize as a shared feeling, "Yeah, sometimes the spotlight gets a little bright."

Newt gave a short nod of acknowledgement, one tired soul to another. Skylar felt very assured with the man in the house.

"Newt Scamander, eh?" Sirius squinted at him unsure, "Did I have to read a book by you? Or some sort of... etiquette for centaurs?"

"Newton Artemis Fido Scamander," Newt introduced himself with an unnecessary flourish, almost mocking the fact he had a long name to begin with. His elbows creaked audibly.

"Sirius Snuffles Padfoot Black," Sirius introduced himself with a small twitch of his mouth.

"Snuffles Padfoot," Newt mused, sounding like he was about to laugh, "On your mother's side I presume?"

Sirius's voice was nasally in his attempt to withhold laughter, "Oh you know, I found all those pure-blood names unnecessary and a pain to write out on ministry forms."

Newt laughed, an honest breathless noise with a small wheeze that betrayed just how old the man was, "I like you, you remind me of an old friend of mine."

Lutain shifted, a startling reminder what Skylar was going to ask to begin with, "Oh, er, excuse me Mr. S- Newt." Skylar corrected himself quickly, "If you wouldn't mind I actually have a question for you. I could grab you a cup of tea if you'd like?"

Tonks clued in quickly that the question was a private one, and in a swift move managed to corral not only Fred and George out of the room (they whined loudly), and dragged Ron out by his ear. Sirius walked along with Hermione, chatting about something irrelevant but interesting enough for her attention.

The Burrow wasn't quiet (It would never be, with all its small homely comforts) but it was as private as ever.

"How may I help you, Skylar Potter." Newt asked, shaping the vowels of his name with a slight grimace.

Skylar smiled thinly, "Just Skylar. Or Sky if you want, I found that only the ministry calls me by my whole name. Or journalists."

Newt squinted at him in thought before he hummed in thought and leant back in his chair with a sigh. He reminded Skylar of Slughorn a little bit, the way he held himself exhaustively or as if he was waiting for some stressful request. Skylar presumed that the man likely had to have done many said requests before, either by the ministry or by past unfair treatment of magical animals.

Skylar dropped off the cup of tea, taking the seat across with a quiet shuffle of the wood chair legs.

"Alright," Newt sighed, shifting slightly as if to brace himself, "What is it you'd like to ask of me?"

Skylar looked at the table, fiddling with the grains in the wood, "I had a friend. I think you would have loved to meet her."

Newt shrugged slightly, looking suspicious. "I'm sure it would have been pleasant."

Skylar shook his head slightly, "No I mean, she was very…" dozens of words flitted through his head. He couldn't quite find the right one- then again it was always impossible to summarize an entire person in a single word. "Disorienting."

Newt tilted his head into a small nod, "I've found in all my journeys, that those most unsettling to us are those who are simply aware."

Skylar inhaled a silent laugh, "Yeah, yeah you could say that. She introduced me to thestrals actually."

Newt nodded looking sad, "I'm sorry for your misfortune."

Skylar ignored it, instead he looked at the cup held between Newt's wrinkled fingers, "No, she uh...she went and fed the thestrals all the time. For years I think, she'd go out in the woods to sit with them and feed them."

Newt paused, so surprised he was motionless.

"She made talismans and things, something about selkies and cat siths. She was afraid Fawkes- a phoenix, wouldn't like her."

"Phoenixes like everyone." Newt mumbled under his breath, but it didn't sound like he was arguing with him. He was trying to fit pieces together.

"Yeah, you would have loved her. She was gentle, and curious. I heard that she got kicked out of the Beauxbaton stables because she wanted to see the pegasus. She wouldn't even cut up potion ingredients."

Newt tapped his fingers against the cup, "I'm so sorry for your loss, Skylar. She sounded interesting."

"She's partially the reason you're here," Skylar confessed quietly, "I don't know how much Hermione told you."

Newt took a sip of the tea, "Honestly I wasn't going to come. I get letters all the time you see, it was only because of Charlie. I've stayed in touch with the Dragon reserve, and I recognized the last name."

Skylar gave a small smile of amusement, "Really? The name of the famous Boy-Who-Lived couldn't convince you?"

Newt snorted into his cup, "Merlin knows I've met too many famous witches and wizards. You all need to keep me out of your bloody business."

Skylar huffed a small laugh, before the mood became serious once more.

"It's...I think we just need advice." Skylar said. "Luna was killed, by a basilisk."

Newt dropped his cup. It spilled a little and Newt scrambled to mop it, pulling out rags from his coat pocket that seemed to be stained with the oddest colours. He mopped it up, not lifting his head as if anxious with the prospect of what Skylar had said.

He mopped the tea almost robotically, thinking silently with wide eyes.

"A...a basilisk?" Newt asked, sounding resigned and at the same time uncertain. "Well, that's...not what I had expected. A *basilisk?"*

"Yeah," Skylar's nostrils flared, "I promised I'd get rid of it. It's...It's done a lot of damage."

Newt licked his lip and blinked in thought, clutching his upper arms across his chest defensively, "I..you want my help to kill a basilisk?"

Skylar looked pained, "I...I understand, that you don't want to kill it. I really do, it's a beautiful creature but I can't ignore the fact it *killed* my *fr-"*

Skylar choked and he looked away, one fist raised to his mouth as it to keep himself composed. "I'm sorry," Skylar breathed, closing his eyes to settle himself. "I made a promise that I'd take care of her. It's...the basilisk is intelligent, it *understands* what it did. I think, that even though it's a magical creature, it should be held responsible for its actions."

Newt folded his hands on the table and stared at them, looking quietly devastated. "This basilisk...it didn't just kill your friend, did it?"

"No." Skylar admitted quietly, "I...I think that it contributed in the rise of Voldemort."

Newt hissed something low and sour, "Figures I get brought in to *another* Dark Lord."

Skylar laughed something cold, "Tell me about it."

Lutain shifted again; Skylar had forgotten that he was even there.

"I uh," Skylar licked his lips before very slowly reaching towards his neck, "I figured you'd like to meet someone- I mean he's...his name's Lutain and uh…"

Newt smiled, as if amused by Skylar's awkwardness.

Lutain hissed, suddenly so loud in the room. The snake slithered, separating himself from under Skylar's shirt and *oh,* suddenly they were apart.

It felt strange.

(Skylar felt nauseous and shaky.)

"Oh, hello there." Newt greeted the snake, not looking as afraid or worried as most people tended to when meeting Lutain. "You're a taipan I believe? A non-magical species but...you feel enhanced." Newt mused, looking excited and intrigued with how Lutain coiled himself regally.

"This is Lutain," Skylar introduced between the two, "He's a familiar to someone who...well. He's a familiar to someone who isn't here right now."

Newt paused and looked at Skylar from the top of his vision, "You're separating a familiar from his master?"

"It's consensual." Skylar assured, shifting in his seat once again, "I promised Lutain that I'd kill the basilisk."

Newt looked at the snake, then at Skylar with an unreadable expression. If the man was confused as to how Skylar could communicate with a snake, or how a snake was intelligent enough to have a sense of commitment, then he never said anything.

"Alright," Newt collectively said, "How much do you know basilisks?"

Skylar paused, "Not much honestly. I should get Hermione, she knows more about basilisks."

Newt shook his head, "No, I feel that I should tell you this. I wrote my book as a guide to help people understand why we should be protecting these creatures instead of killing them. That being said, very few creatures on this planet are as inherently evil and cruel as a basilisk. There's a reason I never included them in my books."

Skylar swallowed and nodded, a sense of foreboding sent shivers down his back. "Okay, I'm not going to like this, am I?"

The old man was impossible to read, not even a thin smile for Skylar's obvious fear. "I encountered one once, and it was terrifyingly intelligent. They had gouged its eyes out, and kept it in a cage as a decoration. The poor thing would entice and behave in a specific way to lure someone to open the cage. It killed five people before it was caught a week later. It took them another week to successfully kill it."

Skylar felt sick. "This basilisk...it's very big."

Newt nodded quietly, forlorn and already accepting the fact. "I'm assuming that this basilisk is terrorizing Hogwarts, which leaves me to presume this is the basilisk Slytherin sealed in his chamber."

"You *knew* it was a basilisk?"

Newt shrugged his shoulders, staying at his tea distantly. "I was...I was fascinated with the story, and determined that out of all creatures, it likely was a basilisk. As such, it was the only thing that could be sealed away, or was a mistake that was sealed away. Please understand, the Chamber had not been opened, it was still a myth."

"A mistake?" Skylar echoed, the one word from Newt's explanation sticking with him.

"It's my personal belief that Salazar Slytherin sealed the beast due to it's accidental killing of his child. He couldn't bear to kill it, so he let it sleep because in the end, a creature as...*monstrous* as a basilisk may one day be needed."

Skylar felt sick, "I...the basilisk killed his child?"

Newt looked unsure, "It is only through my encounters with basilisks in my youth that I have been led to assume my theory. Of course it isn't confirmed, but in my personal opinion the basilisk is the cause of the unexplained death of Mylcades Slytherin."

"Why?" Skylar choked out, "Why..why would it *do* that?"

Newt looked grim, "Well, I'd assume it was jealous. Or it was bored."

Newt Scamander had said that basilisk venom was potent, able to destroy everything it touched. Able to singe and sear and *kill* everything it touched.

(Lutain didn't seem surprised. Lutain wanted the basilisk to die.)

How...funny, that in all the careful plots and calculations of a centuries old serpent, the single overlook was a *tiny black snake.*

Link to Mylcades Slytherin/ Mylla the Thestral before she died

Vitaedax

Chapter Summary

Where the potion is finally explained

Chapter Notes

This is one of the chapters you all have been waiting for!

I'm so hungry it hurts I feel like i'm eating myself from the inside out whycant it juststop-'

"No bloody way," Sirius' jaw dropped, looking absolutely amazed but also very skeptical.

"Do it!" Tonks cheered, laughing from where she was peeking around the corner of the kitchen, preparing breakfast. Half of the hash browns had already been banished, the other half was smoldering far too close to burning. Nobody minded, especially with such great entertainment that the newcomer was providing.

Newt had his bag open, pulling out various potions and objects to find his daily nutritional potion. One of the objects, a collection of vials secured in what looked like magical bubble wrap, was glowing brightly.

"What's going on?" Skylar asked, stumbling into the kitchen not at all prepared for the daily events.

"Sky! Oh, Newt here says he can tell Animagus forms!" Tonks cheered, swaying as she walked into the room curious. Sirius was obviously interested, but nothing had been successfully created for identifying unregistered Animagus. It was realistic to presume some sort of scam.

"Honestly," Newt scoffed, although he looked rather pleased and happy to share what he had. He tapped on the glowing vials lovingly, "It's venom from an Indian species of turtle. See, its prey is a tricky shapeshifter, so the venom allows it to locate hidden prey no matter the disguise. Concentrated and mixed with a root, it does a wonderful job revealing animagi."

Sirius looked at Skylar as if he didn't know how to react. The skepticism was almost tangible.

"I know you're a canine by the way," Newt offered helpfully. "You have a telling bark."

Hermione hurried down the stairs, already dressed and cradling Crookshanks in her arms. She smiled, ducking her head as Newt gave her a small wave. She was polite enough to not acknowledge Sirius' awkward flush. She didn't question the vials on the table, or how everyone seemed gob smacked.

Lutain hissed sharply, his sound cutting through the air sharply. Crookshanks tensed, tail fluffing as the kneezle hissed loudly. Skylar flinched away from the creature and paused, tensing

accordingly with Lutain.

The snake was disgruntled, but still had plenty it wanted known.

Adalonda. It seemed to say, not sounding pleased. *Kill her.*

"We are." Skylar muttered under his breath, turning away slightly to disguise his words. "We have other things to do right now. We need to *learn* about it first."

Lutain's tail twitched in annoyance, whacking against Skylar's ribs pointedly. *Basilisk. Adalonda. Cerestes.*

"Look, I don't *know* what a Cerestes is." Skylar muttered under his breath, grabbing a glass filled with juice. "Wasn't that a weapon?"

"Cerestes?" Newt echoed, he must have had impressive ears for someone likely a hundred years old. Then again, Dumbledore was likely a lot older than that and still performing strong.

"Er, yeah." Skylar stumbled, mucking with his toast as Newt's eyebrows furrowed, "I mean it could be something completely irrelevant."

Newt considered his coffee with a tilt to his head, "A Cerestes is a magical creature living in the deserts of northern Africa."

Hermione slid into the seat next to him, "What are we discussing?"

"Cerestes." Newt smiled politely, "It's a horned serpent, originally found during ancient Greece. They're relatively uncommon now."

"That's strange, I've never heard of a horned serpent." Hermione confessed, not even trying to look unimpressed. Her eyes were nearly gleaming at the new information.

"They aren't true horns, rather they're lures. They hide themselves in the sand completely out of sight, disguising themselves to appear as something vulnerable. Then when attacked, they reveal themselves as actually a predator and consume that which attacked it originally."

Lutain hissed loudly. *Cerestes.*

Skylar rubbed his eyes tiredly, so many magical snakes out there. They had to deal with a basilisk and now there's a horned snake out for them to catch. It figured, it seemed they could never catch a break. A basilisk, Lutain, Nagini, the horcruxes...Skylar couldn't imagine going back to Hogwarts at this rate.

(It wasn't a priority, in his mind.)

"Were you in Ravenclaw?" Hermione asked curiously, tucking her hair behind her shoulders.

"Ah, no. I was in Hufflepuff."

Tonks appeared from the kitchen, whooping loudly before flashing her hair to bright yellow. They exchanged a wink before she resumed cleaning up the workspaces. The food Tonks made all went to the trash.

"I know that name." Sirius muttered under his breath, pausing before shaking his head. "Cerestes...eh."

The morning was uneventful, Hermione nearly interrogated Newt on various topics and subjects but he didn't tire of her questions. He seemed to know everything, or at least could point her in a proper direction.

"Merlin, that man's like Selwyn." Ron muttered, feeling dazed after being part of a discussion on some sort of talking mongoose.

It was just past noon when the floo spluttered something, flames rearing and kicking out what looked like a paperweight. It rolled across the floor, knocking into the bottom of a cupboard with a small clatter. There was a second where the conversation lulled, eventually fading off to an awkward quiet.

"What was that?" Ron asked, peering over to try and spot the noise.

Tonks was staring at the paper weight frozen. It took her two seconds, then she was leaping into action, face hardening into preprogrammed movements. It was easy to forget she was a battle trained auror, until it sharply snapped into focus and startled Skylar silent.

"Sirius!" Tonks shouted through the room, drawing his attention from where he had been outside the front porch, "Remus sent a signal!"

A signal obviously was something bad based on the grim expression on the man's face.

Sirius' jaw locked and he sprinted in the house. Sirius brushed past the group, grabbing a nondescript wall hanger with one white knuckled fist. He rattled off something too quickly for the others to understand, something signature of Moody.

A second later, he popped away.

"What's going on?" Hermione asked, hurrying herself after Tonks. She was almost instantly pushed back from the woman, who was hurriedly spelling available surfaces and the doorframe.

"Portkey," Tonks grunted out. It was startling the difference between her when relaxed and when she was serious, "Something wrong on Remus' end. Sirius hopped over, it'll bring them back over to the lawn there."

"Outside?" Newt asked, suddenly interested with the events that were going on, alert and prepared. "I know that I am not welcome to the actions of your group, but if I may be of assistance I know retainment spells."

Tonks paused for a second before she nodded, tracing a large area of the yard outside, "There, the strongest fire containment spell you know. Not just for humans."

Newt didn't ask, but he did start casting well practiced spells. A few of them were lengthy, likely made to contain a dragon.

"Is it Selwyn?" Skylar asked, rushing to the front window. "Tonks! Is it Selwyn!"

Tonks spun around from where she was standing prepared on the lawn.

"I don't know!" She shouted towards the house, preparing herself nervously, "It could be anything!"

Seconds stretched forever, until they were sticky and painful. The birds chirped on, unaware.

They waited a few seconds more, then the returning pop had three figures kneeling on the grass.

"Remus!" Tonks shouted, nearly leaping forward over the dandelions.

"Stay back!" Sirius shouted instantly, throwing one hand up as if to ward back the household residences. Skylar noticed then, that Sirius himself was a fair distance from Remus and the now collapsed body between them. Remus stood slowly, wobbly in his knees and stained wetly as if someone dumped water over his shirt.

There was a lot of blood.

Earlier.

"Why do you let me walk around?" Adrian asked, leaning against a window peering outside. The glass fogged from his breath, humid on the clear pane.

Remus didn't look up from where he was chopping tomatoes for the sandwiches he was making. "I don't see why you should be locked up."

"I killed someone." Adrian spoke blankly, "Doesn't that mean I should be locked up?"

Remus placed the tomatoes on the plate, folding the bread over to complete it, "I'm not sure. I believe that it depends on the situation."

Adrian didn't respond to that, or continue that trail of thought. Instead he grabbed the sandwich and chowed down, plowing through the two in less time than it took to make. Remus would make him more in an hour. Feeding him too much in one sitting led to him vomiting. It was an uncomfortable experience.

"I was thinking, would you like to travel?" Remus asked politely, he had a remarkable calm composition.

Adrian frowned as he looked at the man, "I thought you have things to do here."

Remus nodded, "That's true. I was thinking we could get away for a bit. Take Tonks with us if that's okay, we could travel to Australia or even America. They have Thunderbirds out in the prairies there."

Adrian's jaw moved slightly; he looked back out the window.

Frequently Remus would offer him things like that, and he didn't quite know how to react. He was given blankets, real clothing, every day the werewolf would draw him a bath with the sweetly smelling potions he secretly loved.

It was strange, a velvety soft life that felt so fake and impossible Adrian was waiting for it to collapse.

"I like the smell of outside." Adrian admitted. "The flowers too. I like how they look, and the colours and the petals they have. The smell of the ground."

"It's called petrichor. The smell of the ground after a rain." Remus explained contently. The older man closed his eyes and inhaled strongly, releasing it slowly. "Have you ever seen the ocean?"

Adrian nodded, "A few times. In passing."

Remus chuckled, "I should show you the cliffs of Dover. Or the tropics, there the water looks almost green."

"Is it safe?"

"Completely safe."

Adrian hummed, pressing his forehead against the coolness of the window. He was hungry.

It was quiet, silent and isolating. No whispers except for those inside his head, no sneers or voices or challenging taunts. It was strange to mark the massage of time, his heart beat too common and quick to track.

The ground smelled fresh, the humidity in the air made his hair stick to his neck. He hadn't had the time to sit down and watch the grass in a long while. He didn't think it grew as green at Rowle's estate, in the overrun garden his father never cared about.

"I miss Luna." Adrian later confessed quietly, sitting crossed leg on the tiny porch. His knees were drawn to his chest, one hand clutching wildflowers he had plucked from the dirt. The broken ends leaked sugary sap, the petals velvet under his fingers.

"I know you do." Remus stated simply.

Adrian pulled his knees to his chest, clutching them tightly under his blanket. "I miss her."

Remus breathed the air, "That's natural. To miss something means that we cared about it."

Adrian shook his head slowly, "I didn't. I didn't *think* I did at least, but I didn't want to kill her."

Remus paused, "Adrian you didn't kill her."

I strike Luna

"How did she die then?" Adrian asked blandly, no emotion.

The grass swayed slightly. Sweet and fragrant. The sap from broken stems left his fingertips sticky.

"They said it was basilisk venom."

I strike Luna.

Adrian closed his eyes, pressed his skull against his kneecaps as if it could remove the color of her lifeless skin from his mind.

"I used to like thestrals." Adrian admitted, "I used to think they were beautiful."

"Plenty of people find them beautiful."

"No," Adrian sighed, "It wasn't the thestrals. It was the idea. I had some sort of...notion, that death would solve everything. And because of that I thought thestrals were beautiful."

Adrian breathed in and out, his nostrils whistled.

"It isn't," Adrian quietly admitted, "Death isn't beautiful. It's disgusting, it's horrible but I don't know if I *believe* that anymore, or if that's just another expectation."

"I'm so sorry, Adrian." Remus admitted, "and I know that I will never truly be able to convey with words, how deeply I feel for all of your suffering."

Adrian smiled sharply, viciously with no target. "It is exceptionally terrible, being Adrian Selwyn. I don't suggest it, it was a horrible decision."

"What is it you wanted to be? As an adult in the world?" Remus asked him, passing over yet another apple. Adrian bit it, the crunch was loud like the snapping of bone.

"It doesn't matter."

"Of course it matters."

Adrian chewed, and bit again. He chewed and chewed and consumed until he tossed the apple's spine to the floor amid a pile of skeletons. "A magizoologist."

Adrian ate another apple, pulling his arm back to throw it. It hit the ground, rolling until he couldn't see it anymore.

"I wanted to work with magical creatures, like Hippogriffs or Sphinxes. I thought maybe they'd find a use for me, I could talk to Runespores. That was before...I just wanted to be good enough." Adrian huffed and curled in on himself, "I just wanted to prove I shouldn't have been thrown away."

Remus offered one arm in invitation. Adrian looked at him before sliding over, tugging the blanket with him to rest in the crook provided.

"I hate it," Adrian admitted quietly, "I hate the fact that I... I *know,* that I should just…" Adrian's voice garbled uncontrollably, "but I know I can't. I never could. I know, that even if there's the *slightest* chance of him being proud of me, of him saying *'good job;* I can't leave."

"That's not how families are supposed to work, Adrian." Remus reminded him gently, "That's not how love is supposed to be."

"I think he's incapable of loving, so don't try to persuade me with that shite," Adrian murmured under his breath with no heat, "I don't think that I am destined to be loved."

Remus' arm tightened sharply, "Don't say that."

Adrian smiled, almost amused at how angry Remus was at his words.

"I mean it, don't *ever* think that you aren't allowed love or affection or anything good in this world." Remus scolded sharply, "You are. You deserve everything you could possibly want and more."

"I don't *know* what I want." Adrian mused to himself.

"Love," Remus said. "Affection. Acknowledgement. Revenge."

"Revenge implies that I'm inflicting harm on someone for a wrong suffered at their hands." Adrian grumbled, "I don't know if I even care anymore."

"Of course you care," Remus assured, "You're in pain, you're suffering, you don't know what to do with it. You do care."

Remus' heart was strong and loud, nearly vibrating with every pulse. Adrian breathed with him, the heavy rise and fall of his lungs prompting him to breathe on his own.

Breathe in the humid air.

Let her starve.

He is prey.

Avada Kedavra.

Kill her.

I strike Luna.

Breathe out from his lungs.

"I hate them," Adrian breathed from his lungs, the truest statement he ever said, "I hate them, because every time I look in a mirror I wonder why I wasn't good enough for them. I hate them because they had a *chance* to fix this, and they didn't. They've made me into a monster."

Adrian was sitting on the front porch, nearing noon.

Remus was inside, preparing food once more. Adrian felt like he was starving, his stomach distended from a meal just before.

He hated it.

He *hated* it.

He wondered when Remus would go back to Skylar, when he would go back and take care of the Golden Boy.

"That's okay", Adrian hissed out loud, speaking Parseltongue with the freedom of knowing it didn't matter. *"I am used to people forgetting about me. My brother is the famous and smart one. I have nothing to offer."*

He thought that speaking would make him feel better. It didn't.

The grass was swishing, a bird was circling above.

"Bella and Draco are coming soon," Adrian reasoned out loud, watching the wildflowers sway. *"They'll take me, and then it won't matter at all. Remus can go back to Skylar, and I'll be back where I belong."*

Under the dirt, worms would be moving. Gnawing through roots and dirt and carving pathways. Avoiding stones, leaving nutrients for the grass and flowers to use and to reach for the sun.

"Then I'll go back to my destiny," Adrian licked his dry lips. *"I'm supposed to be a tool, a decoration on my father's mantle. I wanted Skylar dead, I want revenge and I know he isn't going to help me with that. Remus can't help me with that. I don't know if I want that anymore, or if it's an expectation for me to follow."*

Adrian didn't know what to do.

"I'm the Chosen One. I don't know if what I'm doing is right. I don't know if it's what I want."

The meadow was peaceful, settled and calm. A lush thriving expanse of life and serenity. Luna would have loved it. Luna would have hated him if she knew about his secrets.

Adrian wanted to make the meadow burn.

The air was humid, there was water in puddles between the roots of crabgrass and soil. It was moist, muddy, and not at all weather for fire.

"I'm the real Boy Who Lived. Not Skylar. I can do whatever I want." Adrian hissed lowly, rolling the sounds from the instinctive movements of his tongue. They warmed him and numbed him. Inspired him with hopeless foreboding.

It took less than a half second for a patch of grass to dry, to shrivel and pop as suddenly, it was little more than tinder.

It took four seconds before a bonfire was raging, burning and searing the ground akin to a fireball.

It took ten seconds for the fire to become as large as a barn, boiling and rolling with the viciousness of a sun. It was orange, molting and burning and Adrian wanted it to *burn.*

(His face was going sticky. His eyes were crying blood.)

It swelled and rolled, shifting in shape and twirling in his desire. He wanted it to move, he wanted it to *dance.*

"Skylar can't do this. Skylar isn't as powerful as me. Skylar is nothing compared to me."

A head arched from the flame, just as hands wrapped around Adrian's chest and yanked him inside away from the sweltering danger that the fire was. It was growing still, bigger and bigger. The room was tinted red, glowing through the windows. A supernova just outside, long shadows and sweating heat inside the shelter of the house.

A fireball rolled outside, the craning neck of something shapeless and draconic that was growing and *growing.*

It was large, the largest Adrian had seen. The largest he had ever made.

(Bigger than anyone else could make.)

(Bigger, dare he think it? - than his own father's ability.)

It hurt- *he* hurt.

More people- another person.

(Was he bleeding from his pores? From the glands beneath his tongue and in the corner of his eyes and-)

Then...gone.

Adrian blinked a half dozen time, unable to process what had happened. He was- he was cold. He was suddenly so *cold.*

Words were slurred, shifting in stilted noises. He was choking on iron, thick warm fluid that was

sliding down his throat. His coughs were wet and gurgled. Everything was red.

(Was that how his father saw? Through a veil of crimson until everything was just...*red?*)

"Stay back!" Sirius shouted, holding on arm outwards towards Tonks as Remus stood slowly. Adrian was limp, breathing shallow with air bubbles through the blood. His eyes were wide open, sightless.

"Remus! What happened to him?" Tonks fretted, pacing back and forth on the other side of the line, whining high in her throat.

"Oh Merlin," Skylar breathed, feeling the urge to hurl. Hermione and Ron gasped, chests heaving as they watched the figures outside.

"Is he alive!" Tonks shouted, one hand tangling in her hair, "Remus *is he alive?"*

"He's alive." Remus croaked out, pale and swaying as he cradled Adrian in his arms, taking one step towards the house.

"Sirius, step away." someone new spoke. Remus snapped his head up in confusion, he had never seen this man before.

Sirius stepped back grudgingly, watching carefully as the new man, frail and old, squinted at Adrian with something unreadable. He took care to stay behind the line of a ward.

"Remus- that's your name?" the man asked slowly, nodding when Remus gave the shakiest nod, "Alright. I've heard that you're a werewolf, which is the only reason I'm going to let you keep touching the child."

Tonks snapped her head around, her eyes wide. It was obvious that Remus had been treated terribly due to his curse- or was rarely treated with kindness.

"I'm going to cast a spell," Newt spoke lowly, careful to show his movements. One hand slipped into his pocket, retrieving a wand that had seen better days. "Just to see what may be wrong with him."

"He's sick." Skylar spoke through the window, Newt looked at him from the corner of his eye. The younger children were staying indoors, aware of the threat at hand. That alone, spoke volumes.

"Luna said he was sick. He felt sour, like pus." Skylar continued, knowing instinctively that somehow, Newt would have heard of magical synesthesia.

Newt's cheek twitched, but he nodded. He understood, and was reevaluating the threat at hand.

Remus' breathing was heavy, but he nodded, allowing Newt to walk closer to the wards. Remus held Adrian close and Newt took one more step nearer, just on the other side of the closest containment spells. He had already crossed several wards, leaving a bare few for the illusion of security.

Newt cast a spell, one that sounded exotic in nature. The spell was moderately fast, silvery and circled like a mist once it reached Adrian. Detection spells, although not one that Remus had ever heard before.

(One that was unlikely the mediwitches had tried.)

Adrian twitched, groaning slightly before curling inwards further.

"Okay," Newt carefully stated, mindful of how Remus was looking very, very protective. "That was very helpful. I don't know yet what's wrong with him, but he has a very dark force around him. How old is he?"

"My age," Skylar choked out, nearly shouting to cover the distance. The Golden Boy was practically leaning out of the open window, trying to get as close as he could. "This has only started in the last couple years."

Newt nodded slowly under Remus' careful eye, "It's...it's similar to something I've seen. Not an obscurus, but it's...I wonder." Newt murmured, pointing his wand slowly once again at Adrian.

The new spell was old Latin, shiny and blue as it spiraled over towards Adrian.

Adrian *flinched,* giving a *howl* as he spasmed, more blood drooling from his mouth in a pink foam. The corners of his eyes were bleeding, as if his tear ducts had ruptured. He looked like a plague. The area around him flickered red, pulsating sourly with a smell of rot.

(Was that what Luna had always seen? Always *smelled?*)

Newt took a step back, but looked once again somewhere between confusion and horror. "It's a blood malediction."

"Impossible!" Sirius shouted, shaking his head quickly, "we had him tested for that in St. Mungos!"

Adrian was bleeding from no injuries, but from every open sensory orifice. His ears, nose, mouth, eyes- it was horrifying.

"I- I *know!"* Newt scrambled, shaking his head back and forth, "It- It's just like a blood malediction! It isn't curse based, which I had *thought* given his state."

"He's in *pain!"* Tonks screamed desperately.

"Okay! Fine!" Newt snapped pointing his wand at the child once more, he snapped out a spell that was complicated. Foreign in a way Skylar couldn't recognize the language.

This one, the narrowed detection spell; this spell was the right one.

Adrian *puked,* something red and filled with far too much undigested food. But throughout it, and from his eyes and ears something black started dripping. Thick and pearlescent with a strange shimmery sheen. Unicorn blood mixed with tar. Black, thick and grotesque to look at.

Newt leapt backwards, scrambling away as if he hadn't expected the spell to work. The black globules touched grass, instantly the green stems faded to yellow and died on contact. There was no hissing, or smell of sulfur. As soon as the black globs touched something alive, it drained the life and fell apart like aged sandstone.

"That's it." Newt's voice was shaken, he looked horrified as if Adrian was something unspeakable. "...that's what it is."

"You know what's wrong with him?" Skylar hurried, his hands shaking. His voice was horrifically scratched over the distance. "You know what's wrong?"

"He's highly contagious." Newt worried out loud, running a shaking hand through his greyed hair.

"Not to Remus due to the lycanthrope. Any of us, you *cannot* touch any of the blood."

"What?" Tonks' voice was high pitch, although she maintained a safe distance "He- it's *contagious."*

"Stun him." Remus requested, still holding the seizing boy. "I don't have my wand on me."

Sirius looked at Newt who nodded, and then very carefully stunned Adrian. The bleeding slowed the moment the boy went utterly limp. His arms extended in a partial stretched movement. His palms opened in his limp unconsciousness. His fingernails were trimmed to nubs, his flesh pale and his wrist so thin the bones were pronounced. He looked like he was being crucified in Remus' arms.

"What's wrong with him?" Sirius asked, careful to start banishing the fluids all over the ground. The black ooze was resisting spells, laying in strange vicious clumps like congealed jelly.

"It's bad." Newt grimaced, "Paracelsus- a Greek wizard from before the dark ages, named them vitaedax. It's a parasite."

"A parasite? Like a worm?" Tonks asked, looking very much liked someone on the verge of a breakdown. "Adrian has *worms?"*

Newt's face was unreadable, "Could one of you call for Mr. Dumbledore possibly?"

They shuffled Adrian into the house, clearing off a couch in the living room. Sirius hastily threw a sheet over the furniture, a thin white barrier between skin and worn fabric.

Remus deposited Adrian gently, shifting his limp limbs over the sheet and tucking a pillow under his head. Tonks reappeared, looking grim before passing a warmed moist washcloth to the werewolf. Without hesitation, Remus began cleaning away the caked bits of gore from Adrian's skin.

"Diffindo." Tonks cast carefully, splitting the seams of Adrian's shirt. Remus pried it off carefully, setting it aside in a warped rusted bucket Sirius scrambled to place there.

"It's very contagious, but only through blood contact," Newt hurriedly explained, shuffling through his bag and reaching so far down his entire arm vanished inside its depths, "Phlox pollen is the only thing I know to neutralize it, but it doesn't kill it. To do that it needs to be completely cut off, metal and salt should hold it for now."

"Phlox?" Ron whispered, looking at Hermione who was even startled at the name of the flower.

"How do we *kill* it?" Skylar broke the silence, hurrying back with towels and soft blankets, "The- how do we sterilize the yard?"

"I'll isolate it." Newt grimaced, "I've isolated the parasitic life force before from unfortunate souls. Obscuri. Maledictus. Never a vitaedax; I'm over a hundred but Merlin, I'm never going to get a break, am I?"

Adrian wheezed on the couch, unconscious yet gagging out a bubble of blood. It popped silently, gathering on the split edges of his lip.

"What was he doing to trigger this?" Newt scrambled, grabbing a few bottles and something filled with an orange powder, likely the pollen. Something else was glowing, something that caused

Newt to pause and look at it. He stared at it far too long, before gently reaching and plucking the glowing vial free from the bubble wrap.

Skylar had seen that potion from before, the same one Sirius and Tonks were all excited about that morning. Venom from some sort of sea turtle?

"Skylar," Newt stated slowly, pausing after a few moments to gather his thoughts. "...This is Lutain's familiar partner, isn't he?"

Skylar chewed his lip slightly, he should have explained the situation fully before anything had escalated. It was too late to lie, and the man likely deserved the truth anyways. He was going to help them with the basilisk. "Yes. His name's Adrian, on the couch there."

"Adrian, right." Newt sighed through his nose quickly, plucking the glowing vial and waving it through the air meaningfully. "You're aware that he's an Animagus, correct?"

"He's a *what?"* Sirius yelped in surprise, glancing over at the other similarly glowing potions wrapped in bubble wrap. They weren't just shining the white light from before, now they were a sulfuric yellow. When Sirius had taken one before in his hand, it had been a deep royal blue. Unmistakably different.

Now, they were glowing bright like headlamps. The only new presence in the room was Moony (who couldn't create an Animagus form anymore due to his furry little problem), and Adrian.

The potions wouldn't have been outright glowing unless Adrian *had* an active Animagus form. Which meant Adrian had *successfully* achieved an Animagus form. Luna had said that Adrian had been trying, but for some stupid reason Skylar never thought he had ever actually done it. Skylar should have known better.

Bloody hell, things were just getting more and more ridiculous.

"Can you help him or not?" Remus asked quietly, his steady hands had cleaned much of Adrian's face. It was sunken, more ill looking than Skylar remembered. He could count the other's ribs, it reminded him of emaciated prisoners. Behind him, Hermione made a small gagging noise, staying far back. She was aware that she couldn't contribute much to the situation.

"I'll be able to neutralize the spread for now. It's only temporary, until he pushes himself once again." Newt hurriedly explained, setting the bottles to the side as he dug through his bag for something else.

"Sir, I don't think I understand." Hermione interrupted, rudely. With how desperate everything was, it was easy to understand her blurt. "This...parasite. What does it *do?"*

"Vitaedax are rare, and truly ravenous monsters." Newt explained roughly, grabbing a few other strange ingredients to hastily crush together into a slimy paste, "Quite rare, I only knew them in passing and in reference. They were used a lot, especially by Grindelwald, but the flaw is with them is it takes years to get to a noticeable level. Once you're there, you have only a short window of opportunity. Devastating of course, one wiped out almost all of Treviso under Grindelwald."

"Treviso?" Ron blinked in confusion, staying behind Hermione.

The girl in question looked over her shoulder quickly, "Treviso is a city in northern Italy." She explained incredibly briefly, turning back to look at Newt with a narrowed eyed desperate look. "A window for *what?* What could...could this...*thing* offer?"

"Power," Skylar blurted, looking horrified. Everything clicked into place far too clearly. "The train. Guys, the wandless magic."

Sirius cursed loudly, looking ready to kick a wall, "The damn book. That *damn* book."

"Right." Newt nodded to Skylar, looking grim as he continued. "Vitaedax are malevolent dark parasites that exist on a plane unable for us to see normally. Whereas other parasitic forces like obscuri infect and feed on the magical reserve itself, vitaedax feed on the passageways, or the channels by which we use our magic."

"Our souls." Remus' eyes widened in realization, "That's why I can't be infected. Lycanthropy is a malady of the body *and* soul."

"Wait wait," Hermione scrambled, staying well clear of the area as Tonks hurried back and forth from the sink with water, "This...this thing infects his *soul?"*

"Maybe that's why he's been bonkers since that basilisk." Ron suggested over from where he was tantalizingly close to a trash bin, "I mean, you know."

"Oh," Skylar breathed, "Oh Merlin."

The horcrux. The idea of splitting your soul to hide a segment in an object. From what Skylar had gathered, Adrian didn't do it for immortality, but he did it to prevent the natural death of Lutain. Lutain had said that the basilisk was the one who told him what to do- that Adrian didn't even know the *name* of what he had done. Of all things, *why* split a soul when there could be dozens of other possible ways to extend an animal's lifespan?

If a fire was burning, it would finish much faster if half of the log was removed from the flame.

Newt grabbed the paste, wielding what looked like a long rubber spatula in his other hand. In almost careless movements, he slapped a big glob of the slightly lavender mixture onto Adrian's chest, slathering it around until right over his sternum, he was iced like a cake. All he needed was the cherry on top.

Newt relaxed finally, scooting away from the boy and werewolf as if the worst of the damage was over. Assumedly the paste would contain the spread of this...this *parasite.* Either it would somehow be contained and wouldn't spread further, or it was temporarily in stasis. Skylar didn't know nor understand enough about what was going on to have a genuine opinion.

"I have a very important question I would appreciate you being honest with me to answer." Newt stated, reaching into the bubble wrap to pull out one of the glowing vials, sulfuric yellow and bubbling slightly. Newt brought it over Adrian, watching as the glow increased slightly in luminosity. It was responding to Adrian.

Newt uncorked it, yet instead of pouring it the liquid bubbled aggressively and dissipated into a thick gas. It twisted and turned over itself, like an intangible yellow meringue. The gas shifted until it resembled a serpent, made of thick foam like the arching fury of fiendfyre. A crest rose from between its eyes down its neck, like a spine from some prehistoric monster.

"Magical Animagus forms are impossible to achieve," Newt stated very calmly, even though he was holding a vial with a very pissed off sulfuric magical creature, "However, they can be obtained through direct artificial influence of a magical creature and its core. I've heard this about dragons, and met a unicorn Animagus although that took her nineteen years of living with the herd. Or rather, allow me to rephrase my question. How is it that Adrian here has a basilisk Animagus form,

if he *hasn't* spent likely *years* in incredibly close contact with one?"

Anyone could hear a pin drop in the room.

"Well, you see Mr. Newt Sir." Tonks started quietly, "Adrian here is ah, a parselmouth."

"Right." Newt blinked and breathed slowly. "This makes much more sense. Alright, yes, the basilisk has to die."

Adrian woke up with a groan. When he opened his eyes, he couldn't recognize the ceiling. It was wood, worn with cracks through the exposed floorboards.

His head was *pounding,* whispers through his ears in languages he didn't know. Impossible to discern.

He blinked twice, pausing as the world lagged after, distorting slightly in a glazed tinge. Then it focused once more, and the pounding receded slightly.

He was on a couch, he could recognize the feel of the cushions under his back. There was a clock, ticking loudly in a way that pierced his skull. His nose felt crackly, like it had a layer of frost through it. His hearing felt muffled, and his eyes prickly.

"Adrian!" Someone spoke, rushing around to kneel next to him, carefully not touching his skin although one hand was raised as if tempted.

Adrian would recognize that frizzy hair anywhere, even half asleep.

"Hermione?" Adrian asked, blinking lazily as he rolled his head to the side, "What-?"

"I- You came in because you were sick." Hermione hurried in a rushed tone, stepping upright and stumbling backwards as Adrian forced himself into a sitting position. As the blanket draped around his hips, he was suddenly aware that he was nearly bare under the fabric over him. There were faint blood stains where his head had been. Rusted and flaking, like water stains on his pillow.

"I can get you Remus!" Hermione already started to move away, "He's making you food."

"When isn't he?" Adrian murmured, sniffing sharply. His nose and throat stung painfully.

Hermione smiled slightly and Adrian stumbled to his feet, clutching the blanket close to his shoulders to keep him covered. His head was pounding, whispers in and out.

Tick

Tick

Tick

The clock was pounding through his skull like a hammer.

Adrian stumbled through the room towards the kitchen, staring in silence. Tonks and Remus were working smoothly together. Familiar, smiling, and without him.

Tonks peered over her shoulder, smile widening in pure joy when she saw him, "Adrian! You're awake!"

Remus turned, and he beamed as well, sliding a plate to the side, heaping with food that looked handmade.

Adrian stood in the doorway, feeling chilled and out of body. "Why am I here?"

Remus didn't even blink, "You were injured, I brought you here because I'm not the best at healing spells."

Adrian snorted lightly, it stung his throat. "You could have left me there. I'd be fine."

"Actually, you're rather wrong on that." Someone old spoke from behind him, cautious yet intrigued. Adrian turned around, looking over his shoulder with a small frown.

The man was familiar, in a way sometimes names were. He was wearing an old coat, tweed with many pockets. He looked shabby, run down in a way Remus was with wrinkles and laugh lines and the sadness in his eyes of a man far too empathetic. Someone who had worked long and hard for something people cared little for, and never stopped trying.

"I know you," Adrian spoke, voice hoarse but level. "I know your face, don't I?"

The man gave a few small nods, looking around the room as if confrontation itself unsettled him, "Ah, yes I presume you would. My name is Newt Scamander."

Adrian balked in surprise, clutching the blanket tighter around his shoulders. "You're retired."

Newt shrugged his shoulders and gave a small sheepish laugh, as if that would explain his presence, "Ah well. I heard that you had a basilisk problem and I couldn't resist."

Adrian took a half step back, "I don't know what you're talking about."

This man couldn't possibly know about Adalonda- they would only call in an expert if they wanted to remove her.

'They wouldn't' Adrian thought dazedly, nearly swooning at the thought. *'She's done nothing wrong.'*

Newt smiled, a look in his eyes was very similar to nostalgia, "I guess you wouldn't. I have to ask; do you know you are housing a parasitic entity?"

'What?'

Adrian blinked twice, "I- what?"

Newt sighed, "No, I guess they never do know."

Adrian felt a rising surge of anger, and without a care he jerked his head forward, met the man's eyes, and *pressed* and-

Something large and black. Smokey yet powdery, like a million grains of black salt. It moved like fluid, and felt frozen even from a distance. It was beautiful, and terrifying.

A boy, perhaps Adrian's age with pale skin and sharp cheekbones. Convulsing, jerking back and forth with a snarl across his face akin to a rabid animal. His skin stretched, boiling and distorting and then- then the mass the entity was roaring, screaming in a million voices and tendrils of hate and anger and destruction.

"I think that's enough now." Newt sighed politely, turning his head to break the connection, "I get enough of that from my sister-in-law."

"What was that?" Adrian asked in awe, quiet fascination that he would never be able to deny. Remus and Tonks were silent, watching the unspoken conversation quietly.

"That was an unfortunate child, who died long before you were born, perhaps before even your parents were born." Newt sighed, looking haunted as if it still bothered him to the day, "his name was Credence. He was something called an obscurus."

Adrian twitched slightly, "I know what obscuri are. They're all gone."

Newt gave a small huff, "Yes I suppose you would know what they are. I've met three, all terrible circumstances. I've encountered others as well, maledictus, nagarus, curses and monsters and cat siths and so many more." Newt raised his hand to tap along his temple, "Would you like to take a look?"

Adrian shifted unsure, pulling the blanket closer around his shoulders, "No. I'm fine."

Adrian would never admit it, but he was rather afraid to see what the other knew. To see the memories of monsters and creatures and- and Adrian was *jealous.*

Adrian had read his book a dozen times over, written topics and thoughts in the margins until it was more of his ink than the publisher's. He had discussed the book over and over, conversing with Luna over creatures that seemed too obscure to be true.

(They both knew they were true. They just liked to argue over outlandish things, like if pinecones were a suitable dietary replacement for a selkie.)

"Luna would have loved to meet you." Adrian whispered quietly, and his heart stung painfully. "She talked about you a lot."

Newt smiled, he had dimples in his leathery face, "I've heard a lot about her. She seemed quite spectacular."

"She was extraordinary," Adrian countered coldly, "She thought the world of you."

"From what I've heard, she thought highly of you as well." Newt countered.

Adrian flinched and looked away, Newt's face softened, "Adrian, I want to talk with you. I want to help you."

"You can't." Adrian responded without a breath of pause.

Newt gave a small sigh, "Perhaps not, but I'm afraid you don't know what's happening to you. I know that you're in a lot of pain, and you're very hungry. I know that you must be very scared."

Adrian locked his jaw firmly, not looking at the man. He was hungry, but confessing or admitting that felt like a defeat. It felt as if Adrian was agreeing to whatever the man- famous or not- wanted. The conversation was over, he, as well as the others in the room, recognized that.

"Adrian, would you like to wash up for dinner?" Tonks asked teasingly, swatting him with a dish towel. Adrian turned to look at her, his expression blank. She still smiled, happy as if him simply being there was enough.

"Where's Lutain?" Adrian asked.

"With Skylar, he's taken a liking to your familiar." Newt nodded towards the stairs, waving his wand silently.

A few minutes later Adrian heard a stumble of feet, and Skylar ran into the kitchen, looking breathless.

"Adrian!" Skylar grinned, and around his neck, was Lutain.

Adrian's heart beat twice, thumping loud and hard as if the world had nothing left to say.

"What did you *do."* Adrian inhaled sharply, looking at Lutain. The black snake flicked his tongue in the air towards him, body tightening instinctively around the brunet as if making a statement.

Adrian couldn't hide how his face was skewed in horror. "Skylar, what have you done with him?"

"Skylar has been mine since you've been gone, Master." Lutain informed him politely, although distantly, *"I've made a deal with him."*

"What?" Adrian whispered, his voice crackling rather horribly. Skylar's eyebrows furrowed and he opened his mouth to talk, only to stop in dim realization as Lutain reared and hissed. The boy hadn't realized the conversation wasn't directed at him.

"He has helped!" Lutain defended sharply, *"Keeps me safe and protected. Terrible things have happened."*

"I'm *looking* at one!" Adrian snapped out, at this point Skylar's face had fallen and the room was silent as everyone present realized the unspoken taboo.

"Not all is bad. He offers decent rats. Yours are better, but you are sick."

"You didn't care before."

"It's bad, Master. It reeks of rot. You're dying."

Adrian shook his head, hating how his eyes were burning. This was *personal*. *"Lutain we had- we were going to kill Potter! Not befriend him!"*

"You didn't seem like you wanted to."

"What the- I was mourning! That's what people do when people die!"

Tonks and Skylar flinched at the unexpected parseltongue. Newt in contrast only looked more amazed. Remus didn't blink, Adrian had taken to talking to himself in the unknown language when he needed to think freely.

"Skylar has been useful to me-"

Adrian *screamed*, a loud vicious downright furious noise. "*How dare you say that!"*

Lutain recoiled, then hissed threateningly, reared towards Adrian as his master's hands curled into angry claws.

"Alright, alright." Remus interjected, moving between the two slowly, "Let's calm down here."

"I'll calm down when you realize that your mind has rotted! You do not see the possibilities!"

"You're sticking with Skylar! You're choosing bloody Skylar!"

"You do not see reason! There is more at play here!"

"'You're with the- you bloody picked Skylar!"

"I don't know what you're saying Adrian," Remus shushed him gently, snapping the tension suddenly. "I need you to calm down."

Adrian was trembling, at some point the blanket around his shoulders had slipped slightly. His collarbone looked like it was simply laying on the surface of his body.

"Adrian," Newt began, talking very formally. "You're something called a vitaedax. It's a parasitic force, which feeds on your soul which is the channel for your magic. I need you to calm down, because any accidental magic is very dangerous."

"Good." Adrian sniped out, glaring at Lutain but not really listening.

"Bite me."

"No, Adrian I need you to listen to me," Newt shushed, stepping beside Remus to block his line of sight completely, "Adrian, you're in very late stages. You've likely had this for years, which means someone purposely infected you with it. It's made your magic very wild and unpredictable, because you now have little to no control over it."

Adrian seethed and ducked his head, he already *knew* that he was powerful.

"At this rate, we cannot separate it from you without killing you. But, if you continue to abuse your magic at this rate you likely have only a few years left."

"What?" Adrian whispered, eyes wide in confusion. What was the man implying? Only a few years left? Left for *what?* "I- I'm dying?"

Newt's face was pained, "I'm so, so sorry."

Adrian felt his skin split and he winced, hunching over as the sick twisted sensation of Nagini twisted over his stomach. Remus reached out, gently placing one palm against his shoulder as if to steady him.

"Tonight." Nagini hissed dumbly, then vanished.

"Oh Master," Lutain hissed quietly, as if disappointed or frustrated all in one, *"What have you done?"*

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Pseudonym

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian and Newt talk, where Adrian and Tonks bond, and where Remus learns what he shouldn't.

Chapter Notes

I know this is all being stretched out slowly, but I promise its all necessary for the character development!
Check out the end for the link to all the fanart!
Follow me on Tumblr to ask questions and get exclusive sneak-peaks.

'Lutain doesn't understand he doesn't get it he he was always good always useful NAgini always liked him father liked him he was always liked he wasn't he wasnt thrown away he doesnt he doesnt-'

Lutain was at an ultimatum.

He knew, he heard the inked serpent speak. He *knew* that something was happening. That night, most likely some sort of...attack on the den.

If Lutain *told* Skylar, than his Master would know instantly based on the preparations. If he *didn't* tell Skylar, then the chance that Lutain would be taken back to assist his Master, was high- and the likelihood of the basilisk's death very little.

If he simply refused to rejoin his Master, then he was ensuring Adalonda's death; if he didn't tell the child at all then it was incredibly likely that multiple people who were important to Skylar would die, and thus, his worth would decrease.

It was a difficult situation, one that Lutain would have struggled immensely with in the past. But now...with his new sense of individuality and independence well...well his Master smelled *wrong*. He understood the new man's words, he understood that his Master was dying (how ironic), but simply he was a choice. Guarantee the revenge and death of his master, or comfort him and watch him rot.

What an interesting and heartbreaking dilemma he had found himself in.

Perhaps, he could make a deal.

"Can you understand other creatures? Or only serpents?"

Adrian glanced over his shoulder, not moving even as the ancient geyser of a wizard slowly inched his way over and sat down heavily on the couch next to him. "You would not imagine how often

I've wondered that. How amazing, to finally meet someone so gifted."

Adrian's face twitched into the smallest quirk of a smile, "I can understand serpents completely. I think species of reptiles that are closely related to snakes, or more serpent-like are able to understand me, although they're much more...exotic sounding."

"Imagine parseltongue accents," Newt Scamander mused, looking far too content as he reclined on the couch, "What a marvelous thing. I'm almost jealous of you, what I would give to hear the words of a creature is a miracle I will unfortunately never experience."

Adrian inhaled and exhaled slowly, his chest rising and falling. They were quiet, enjoying the company in itself.

"Why did you never learn the animagus transformation?"

Newt chuckled slightly, "In my prime it wasn't well known. Besides that, I found more love for learning and tending to various creatures, not changing myself into one of them."

Adrian would accept that, "It's strange. Confusing."

"I'd believe so. Adjusting to having no legs must have been quite exciting."

Adrian smiled distantly, he could hardly remember it in all honesty. He remembered struggling at first, but after that it was a simply instinctive movement. Using his animagus form had defined muscles along his sides he had never used before. He had strange definition, muscles taught and bulging slightly where others had none. Adrian didn't mind it, it allowed him more flexibility through his back. Adrian had thought that the man would love to hear it, but with the atmosphere of the room he could tell it wasn't the proper time. Newt Scamander wanted something, words gnawing to be let out under the guise of pleasant small talk. Adrian had no need to politeness.

"As charming as this conversation is, you're not here to talk about snakes."

Newt's face sobered up, and instead looked slightly dreading, "No, I suppose i'm not. I'll be honest, I've never met one of you before. I've read about you plenty, but I've never met one."

Adrian gave a dry snort of amusement, "Of course, because supposedly dark parasitizing forces are *so* common."

Newt flinched with a grimace, "You'd be surprised how often they pop up."

Adrian almost laughed at how...*offended* the man sounded. "You sound like you've had one over for tea."

"Well." Newt looked slightly torn, shifting in his seat, "I shared a campfire with one in Africa ages ago. Offered to take one out for that bloody American coffee once also."

Adrian snorted, a low muffled noise which stung his throat. Newt's face was wistful and his smile faltering.

"I'm sad for you," Newt explained quietly, "From what I've gathered you seemed to be quite a fan, the expert on magical creatures apparently in your year and yet you haven't truly *asked* me a single question. You aren't excited, or happy or even more than this...indifference. I think that's what I hate most about these *monsters,* what they do to the hosts."

Adrian twitched slightly, looking at his hands as his body felt chilled. Was that all the man saw

when he looked at him? Not Adrian the person, but Adrian the parasite? Adrian the *object?*

(Was that all *everyone* saw in him?)

"Is that all I am to you?" Adrian spoke coldly, not looking away from where he had been staring at the wall, "A new species of monster who coincidentally has a host?"

"Of course not. What concerns me is that I've heard all these stories of a child named Luna who I assume you were close with, and although others can barely say your name you don't even blink at the thought."

I strike Luna.

He had already come to accept the horrific deed that he had done, he had considered this...this slow death his penance. His weight to bear alone to atone for her murder.

"Well," Adrian paused in thought, "I killed her. I suppose I hate myself enough to not care about the fact she's dead."

Oh, well, that was a sudden realization.

I hate myself. Adrian thought sharply yet with a sense of calm acceptance. He hated himself. That was why he was fine with this- that was why he had snuffed out the growing flame of anger that always presented itself. What use was violence and anger if not for a means? What was the point of...of *trying,* if in the end it would never accomplish anything.

(Perhaps, he *wanted* to hate himself. Did he, Adrian, really deserve anything besides hate?)

He killed Luna.

(He was a *monster.*)

"*You* killed her?" Newt stated, pausing in confusion before he shook his head slightly, "I- I apologize but I had thought that a basilisk killed her."

Adrian blinked slowly, would his eyes shift to the noxious yellow of Adalonda's? "I know."

There was an uncomfortable pause, as if Newt was so baffled by Adrian's confession he had nothing to say.

Adrian hated himself, he *hated* himself.

And yet he didn't feel it.

(Was he able to feel anymore?)

"You seem very close with Mr. Lupin."

"Remus is different," Adrian countered instantly, pulling himself out of the haze of his head without thinking, "He isn't like the others."

"He treats you with a careful hand," Newt cautiously stated, "Its the werewolf. They can sense terminal illnesses."

Adrian's mouth quirked slightly, "Remus is always like that. Even before. I already knew I was dying anyways."

"You did?"

"Well, not from this. Isn't everyone always dying? I couldn't ever imagine living past twenty. Even now that seems very far away."

"That's not a good mentality to have, Adrian."

"I'm just saying I think I always knew I would die, or maybe I just didn't care enough to live. This though...this is fitting. I'm dying by being *powerful,* it's ironic."

"If you permit me the opportunity to study you, perhaps I can assist with isolating the parasitic force."

Adrian laughed, he threw his head back until his neck was exposed and his skull rested on the backrest. "I'm happy to die if it means I had some final purpose, some sort of true use, and Mr. Scamander I can say it was *certainly* worth it."

"I don't think it was." Newt commented quietly, sighing a rattling tired breath, "I have seen some truly horrible things in my time, Mr. Selwyn. I've seen murders and deaths, and taken part in too many to count. I've watched the rise and fall of two dark lords, and now I'm tired. Without a doubt, you are one of the cruelest fates I've seen."

Adrian grinned, teeth vicious and smile partway transitioned into a snarl. "All this means is that I need to work faster, and I need to ensure a few things."

If my time is limited, and I'm going to die, I need to finish what I started.

Newt sighed quietly, Adrian didn't open his eyes.

"Only misfortune happens to those similar to you, Mr. Selwyn." Newt warned. "Whatever you're thinking, you should reconsider."

I need to figure out how to kill Skylar.

"Oh I know," Adrian hummed back, carefree as if truly it was barely of importance, "my life is a tragedy. I think I hadn't cared to truly involve myself to my full capabilities. Now...now with a deadline, I think that It's time for me to step forward."

Newt's stomach dropped with a sense of dread, "Mr. Selwyn I must highly advise against-"

"I think, that I'm done talking." Adrian thought out loud almost curiously.

"Well I'm not." Newt interrupted, his old nostrils flaring. The whites of his eyes were visible. "Mr. Selwyn, if I had known about you years ago I would have invited you to my reserves. I have heard nothing but *glowing* recommendations for your skill-"

"I don't want that," Adrian countered, voice lowering to something soft and muted. "Luna did."

Adrian clambered to his feet, swaying slightly and sauntered off. His footsteps were ghostly quiet.

Newt had a terrible feeling in his heart.

The sun was beginning to set, and Lutain was being downright *irritating.*

"What do you want!" Skylar hissed under his breath, nearly stomping to faceplant on his bed. Ron

and Hermione watched in silence as the black snake hurried after him, hissing incessantly. The more it spoke, the more Skylar felt like something under his skin was twitching, squirming like a dozen worms just beneath his flesh.

It *itched,* it made Skylar *burn.*

Cerestes. Lutain urged angrily. *Cerestes!*

"I don't know what that is!" Skylar screamed into his pillow. Ron reached over to pat his back sympathetically. The touch sent Skylar's back muscles twitching, spasms jerking as if his skin didn't remember how to feel. Everything stung in a echoing tinge, something sick and *wrong.*

The snake hissed again, a higher breathy noise that trickled coldly down Skylar's spine. Skylar wanted to punch a *wall.*

Instead, his hands clawed into the pillows further and he screamed.

Abruptly, Ron reached out to take Skylar's nearby shoulder in a firm grip. He jolted Skylar twice, shaking him gently although with a firm strength. Skylar snapped around, jaw closing with an audible *click* into a twisted snarl. Ron's eyes widened but before any of them could comment, the low simmering rage abruptly vanished. Snuffed out, like a single candle flame.

Skylar panted, *exhausted.* The snake was done too, obviously disgruntled but looking finished with its temper tantrum.

"...you okay there, mate?" Ron asked slowly, moving with careful obvious movements. Skylar's chest heaved as he nodded, feeling distinctly winded. "Yeah, thanks."

Ron only nodded, still moving slow and carefully as if Skylar was going to lash out and strike him.

The snake coiled and looked absolutely *frustrated.* It opened its mouth slowly, unhinging to unreal proportions in preparation.

Skylar spun around and with two fingers, shoved Lutain's mouth shut. "No!" Skylar growled out, feeling the hairs on the back of his neck prickle in annoyance, "I am *really* sick of you."

Cerestes, Lutain argued, tongue flickering in the air as if scolding him.

"Yeah, well, you can't have any more snake friends." Skylar snapped back, resisting the urge to rub the bridge of his nose. "Merlin knows you have enough."

Nagini. Lutain argued, and Skylar got the distinct feeling that the snake was offended.

"Yeah, that snake is a bloody pain, like *you."*

Lutain hissed, annoyed but also curious as to the sudden banter.

"Mate." Ron spoke, low but loud enough to snap Skylar out of whatever trance he had been in. "Mate, you're acting really weird."

"Not my fault," Skylar huffed, pointing one finger at the snake. "He started it."

Did not.

"You totally did! Shut up!"

Lutain hissed something and looked far to ready to argue again.

Ron clapped, the sudden sharp noise and outrageous feel of the action caused both snake and boy to freeze.

"Okay," Ron started hesitantly, "I err...well, you're really freaking me out mate."

Skylar instantly felt guilty, hanging his head awkwardly. "Sorry, the snake's just really riled up."

Ron snorted quietly, "What got its knickers in a twist? Feeling a bit cold? Food too tepid for its mangy taste?"

Lutain hissed low, annoyed but not in the infuriated rage from before.

"None of that," Skylar smiled, resisting the small bubble of laughter, "it keeps going on about that Cerestes rubbish."

Ron groaned and flopped back on the bed, "blimey, *another* snake? How many we at now? Four? *Five?"*

"Four I think," Skylar awkwardly muttered, "Voldemort's got that giant boa thing, and we've got Lutain. Basilisk still running loose, and now we've got some mysterious desert snake?"

"Bollocks mate, ever think we're being played?"

Skylar jolted and looked at Ron as if he had been struck. "Played? What do you mean?"

"Well," Ron grimaced, looking unsure but pretty determined regardless, "it's just like...Before it was just us vs. them, you know? And now we've got like...a dozen monsters and people to fight and it's still just us, you know? Where did all this...*shite* come from? It had to take time to pop up but everywhere we look it's a *new* problem."

"You think they're bluffing." Skylar's eyes widened in surprise. "I hadn't thought of that before."

Ron rolled his shoulder in a half shrug, "I dunno mate. Feels a bit too much like a mind trick, like, what are the chances that *all* of this isn't connected."

Lutain hissed, flinching backwards as if he had something to contribute. Ron looked decidedly unimpressed. "Oi, mangy snake. Yeah, I'm talking about you. *Shut up."*

Lutain huffed and flopped into a tight coil.

Skylar hadn't ever considered that before, that all of the information used against them was actually a bluff.

"Okay, what would *you* do?" Skylar asked, flopping onto his back on the bed next to his friend.

Ron huffed something unsure, "erm, I mean, like in Wizard Chess you always do plays, like a bunch of moves to distract or attack or to shift things around."

"So explain the chess board to me?" Skylar asked, closing his eyes to help visualize it. "Obviously Voldemort's the King."

"Oh bloody hell no. Those ruddy Horcrux things are the king, he's trying to protect them. You-Know-Who is the queen."

The queen on a chess board was capable of doing all moves, the most dangerous threat on the entire board. Often the queen was able to destroy and remove pivotal pieces easier than any other.

"I mean, I'd imagine You-Know-Who has a bunch of close supporters, those would be rooks, because they move straight line and you always know where they hit and move."

That made sense. Likely Bellatrix was a rook in this metaphorical chess set. Heavy hitter, powerful, feared.

"Then we'd have knights. Those are pretty restrained, but they're unexpected. Bloody hard to keep track of, and they can surprise and take quick shots at you all the time."

"That would be the basilisk." Skylar confirmed lowly, imagining how horrible the massive beast was to look at.

"Right, damn snake. So, then we have bishops. I like to think they're the most useful, they can skirt around and behind lines pretty easy. They pin and counter all the time, you hate losing your bishops."

"That would be Voldemort's closest allies." Skylar spoke, but he frowned the moment the words left his mouth. They didn't feel right. "No, no they would be the spies, the sneaky ones?"

"Right." Skylar couldn't see Ron from where he was sprawled, but based on his tone the red head was pleased with the analogy. "But see, in chess bishops are only good if its an open game, because then they can move. If its a closed game where you're all crammed together, knights are your best."

Skylar sat up suddenly. "Ron you're a *genius.* We're playing an open game! They're spreading us so thin they've *made* this into an open game."

"Well yeah." Ron blinked, sitting upright as well. "I reckon they've split us up so much, we can't even tell the big threat now. We've got a raging basilisk, Lestrange on the prowl for her rabid kid, this Cerestes bloke, Death Eaters, *and* You-Know-Who!"

Skylar felt a pang of guilt twist up in him. He itched to dig around for that extensive list he had made, all of the strange things that hadn't lined up with Selwyn.

They were completely useless, every fact Skylar had painstakingly pulled from Luna and Astoria.

Had Luna known? Had Luna known about Adrian or about the Horcrux or about the Parseltongue?

(Had she betrayed them all, or was she only trying her best?)

"Remus thought that Adrian was going to try and kill me at some point." Skylar confessed quietly. "I think that with what we know, he was supposed to be some sort of time bomb."

Ron didn't respond for a while. The silence lagged on.

Didn't want. Lutain hissed, causing Skylar to flinch at the intrusion. The words were thick, cloying in Skylar's brain in a way he didn't ever think he'd get used to. *Broken.*

"I know," Skylar spoke suddenly, jarring Ron but it was quickly evident Skylar was not talking to him. "Did you tell him to make the Horcrux?"

No. Lutain spoke, slowly slithering closer to be near the boy. Ron made a low whimpering noise

when he felt warm scales touch his exposed arm; Skylar's skin tingled and hummed immediately on contact. *Adalonda. Save me.*

"Yeah, I just wondered if he knew how dark it was." Skylar sighed, throwing one forearm over his eyes. Lutain shifted, coiling up and over to rest on Skylar's chest. The heavy weight was comforting and relaxing in a way Skylar couldn't explain. "Why he would...why he would *infect himself."*

Not useful. Lutain responded, misery so thick Skylar almost choked on it. *Not useful.*

"Why would he *think* that?" Skylar balked in surprise, "Bloody hell, Selwyn is one of the most talented wizards I've ever met. A bit barmy, but still bloody useful. Merlin knows we could use him on this side."

Ron huffed sourly, "I don't think so mate. Only a matter of time before someone clues in and Fred and George try to murder him."

"What? Why would they try to kill him? Hasn't he gone through enough?"

Ron blinked with a fairly dull and blank expression. "Sky mate, Selwyn killed my sister."

Didn't want. Lutain defended sharply, rising upwards to show his vividly yellow belly. *Want useful.*

"I think I know that he's going to die anyway." Ron sighed quietly, fumbling his fingers over the comforter of his bed, "I think that's the only reason I can look at him in the face."

"I-" Skylar's mouth suddenly felt dry. He knew of course, but it hadn't sunk in properly. "Adrian is dying."

Lutain twisted and writhed and Skylar was filled with the most *painful* sensation.

"Shite," Skylar gasped, curling in on himself barely aware of how his eyes were welling and his throat felt sick, "Mas- Selwyn is *dying."*

Ron offered a gentle pat on Skylar's back, and that was that.

Adrian sat curled up on the outside porch, a thick patched quilt around his shoulders hiding his body from sight. It was summer, but in the shade of the overhang it was chilly enough Adrian wanted the blanket.

The screen door opened, bouncing off the back wall before slowly swinging shut. A woman bounced out- literally bouncing across the balls of her feet. Her toe nails were painted avocado green, she walked like a dinosaur.

"Wotcher!" Tonks beamed, plopping down into a crossed leg sit next to Adrian, gazing out over the growing corn and swaying grass. "Blimey, it is really nice out. Remus was telling me I should grow a garden for flowers, but all I can grow is potatoes."

Adrian's face twitched into a small smile. "I like potatoes."

Tonks nodded contently, "anyone who doesn't like potatoes is not a person to be trusted. Especially sweet potatoes. Not to be dramatic, but I'd sell my left kidney for a good sweet potato."

Adrian snorted lightly, a wet noise that didn't affect Tonks' grin in the slightest.

"I didn't think anyone was going to talk to me out here." Adrian confessed quietly.

"Well, I could go if you want." Tonks shrugged her shoulders, "but eventually you can't run away from me. I'll get some of that muggle duct tape and tape you to a chair at our house."

Adrian blinked rapidly in unabashed surprise before he looked at her suspiciously. "...why?"

Tonks smiled innocently, "think of how Moony would look. You know that *'why-are-you-like-this?'* face? I live for that face."

Adrian giggled, honest to Merlin *giggled.* Tonks mentally cheered.

"You're going to give him a heart attack." Adrian chuckled with a small shine to his eyes.

"Want to listen to my punk music at maximum volume?"

"Oh my-"

"Want to make matching ear piercings by stealing some of Molly's safety pins?"

Adrian tilted his head back and *laughed.* It was a delightful noise, slightly nasally (which Tonks could figure with that aristocratic bridge), and Adrian's eyes turned squinted. Tonks already found herself loving it.

"I've been trying to convince Remus that we could totally foster magical creatures from a preserve. I mean, I *totally* didn't get in trouble when I was your age by trying to steal a tortoise from the forest."

Adrian's eyebrows shot up, "trying?"

"In my defense, tortoises are actually pretty speedy."

Adrian looked absolutely baffled in all the best ways.

The screen door opened and this time, it was Remus who poked his head out. He had slight crease lines, he was worrying his bottom lip. The moment he spotted the two of them, the wrinkles smoothed from his face.

"There's the two people I was looking for." Remus sighed affectionately, a small quirk to his mouth in all the fondest way.

"I was telling Adrian here about how I tried to steal that tortoise!" Tonks chirped.

Remus' face pinched into the *why-are-you-like-this?* Face.

Tonks' expression lit up like a firecracker, Remus' softened into something Adrian had never seen before.

"I still marvel over how you failed to capture a tortoise."

"Alright, you shut your furry rear. It was a really speedy tortoise, okay?"

Remus chuckled, warm and deep like honey. "Of course it was. I assume you're going

to try and adopt one as well?"

"Oh Merlin no. I'm protecting my potatoes with jinxes if I need to. Tortoises be damned, this is now *war."*

Adrian laughed, and the two adults glanced at him with very soft expressions.

Someone from inside called for Tonks who pouted and rose to stumble inside. She tripped over the door hinge, cursing a storm as she barely made it inside before the screen banged shut behind her.

"She's wonderful."

Remus chuckled, taking Tonks' seat next to Adrian's blanket wrapped form. Adrian paused and glanced into Remus' face, dipping slightly below the surface in all the ways he knew he shouldn't…

"Oh." Adrian breathed, so surprised he hadn't even realized when he verbalized his own shock, "you love her."

Remus arched one eyebrow, maintaining eye contact which was practically an open invitation. "Go ahead."

Adrian nodded the slightest bit, tilting his head just so to peer the slightest bit deeper. Skimming the surface of a moonlit pool, trailing fingers through water and tangible emotion.

Remus loved her- he loved the child he loved the-

Adrian flinched back in awe, "She- she's pregnant."

Remus nodded carefully blinking slowly now as if to dispel Adrian from any unfortunate memories in *that* area. "Yes, and-"

Things caught up to Adrian, and the boy found himself releasing a small pitiful whine. He teetered, Remus catching him firmly against his side.

"You love me," Adrian whined out like a dying animal. (Which, he supposed, he was).

Remus rested his chin on the top of Adrian's head, "Of course I do. I do love you, Adrian."

"Even if my name isn't Adrian?"

Remus paused for only the smallest of seconds, so short it had to be genuine. "Of course."

'You won't,' Adrian thought to himself desperately, '*you shouldn't.'*

"Whatever happens, Tonks and I will always love you. Nothing will change that." Remus assured him with soothing whispers, calloused fingers and scarred hands running through his hair.

'I'm a monster, Remus. You shouldn't love me.'

"Even if I've done terrible things?" Adrian asked quietly, desperately in all ways he hated.

"Always." Remus sternly affirmed, "your past does not define you. It's how you decide to move forward, and what you do that is important."

Adrian shook his head, "I- you should hate me Remus."

"Do you want me to?"

"Y- no." Adrian paused before there was something low and wounded steadily rising in volume. "I-I-"

"It's okay." Remus shushed him, holding him closer and beginning the gentle movements of rocking him back and forth, "when was the last time someone ever let you talk?"

Adrian shook his head, unable to even think.

"I'd make you a vow but my wand's too far away," Remus lightheartedly added, running his hand in steady circles against Adrian's back, "I'm here to listen. I think you're long overdue to just talk."

'You're going to hate me, you're going to hate me.'

"I met L-Lutain at a zoo." Adrian choked out, voice small and weak as he tilted his head sideways to breathe. He was practically laying entirely upon the werewolf, blankets enveloping both of them in a sweltering shell. "H-he was in a cage. I talked to him and he escaped with me."

Remus made a low rumbling noise, assuring Adrian that he was still listening.

"H-he lived under the car for a day because...because I didn't want *him* abandoned because I mean- *I've* been left fou-*five* times now and-"

Remus slowly pulled Adrian in tighter, "we're not going to leave you, Adrian."

"I'm not worth it." Adrian whispered.

"Yes you are."

"No I'm *not."*

Remus gently maneuvered Adrian, sitting next to him with the smaller boy's hands in his. Adrian was almost sixteen now, yet he seemed so small and frail. His skin was porcelain, waxy and clear in all the ways skin should not be. His eyes were glazed, water filled and welling with dismay.

"Adrian," Remus began calmly, holding his fingers tightly as if desperate to convey some sort of message. "Adrian, there is nothing you can say or do that will make me love you less. You deserve so much more than the hand you've been dealt. You deserve the world and *more.* You *are* worth it, and you *are* important. *Nothing* will ever change that."

Adrian's heart beat loudly in his ears.

Thu-thump. Thu-thump.

"I don't want to go back." Adrian whispered, finally tears tailed down his cheeks, pooling on the underside of his jaw. "I don't want to go."

Remus' hands tightened, "Then don't."

Adrian's jaw wavered, trembling loosely. "It's not that easy."

Remus smiled softly, releasing one hand to gently brush back Adrian's fringe, capturing his head in one of his palms. "I know, but if you don't want to go, then I will do everything in my power to make you happy."

Thu-thump. Thu-thump.

"You said you'd never be angry with me." Adrian whispered.

"I won't."

Thu-thump. Thu-thump.

"My name isn't Adrian Selwyn."

Thu-thump. Thu-thump.

Remus shook his head slowly, "Adrian, It's okay. I don't *care.* That doesn't matter."

Adrian recoiled as if struck. "I- what do you mean that *doesn't matter?"*

"Exactly what I said." Remus assured him strongly. "Maybe you were named something else, maybe you were someone else. But now, you're *you.* If you want to change your name, then do it. Don't let others or your past label you as something you're not."

Adrian's mouth was dry, his head spun dizzily. "I-"

"Do you want me to call you a different name? Whatever you need, I'll help."

If a key slid into a lock, it was then that Remus had turned it and clicked it open.

Something new, something bright. Hope, trust, *love.*

Adrian didn't want to die, he didn't want to go back.

(Was this happiness? He could scarcely remember.)

"Can you keep a secret?" Adrian whispered. He had never felt such...conviction before- such assurance that *this,* was the right thing.

He was *tired* of being alone. He was tired of doing everything and the weight of the world on his shoulders.

(Luna had always said he didn't need to act alone, that he could rely on others.)

"I can." Remus promised him, and for the first time Adrian felt that he could trust someone else.

"I-" Adrian's mouth was dry, despite how much he crying and how tight his throat felt, "I- I was left at an orphanage...I think I was s-seven? Maybe?"

Remus nodded slowly, never did he let up in the indescribable comfort.

Slowly, Adrian's voice gained strength.

"A-and and I had Lutain...he- Bellatrix found us…" Adrian's gaze stared off sightless, trembling ever so minutely under Remus' watch, "...she thought that...she thought that being parseltongue would be...useful...and she took me, and she killed so many children and she *took* us and she-"

"You're okay." Remus soothed, carefully adjusting to hold Adrian in a closer grip. The boy was so dreadfully touch-starved.

"...She kept us like...I thought she was a good mother but...but she was *terrible.* She hurt me *so much.* It- it wasn't right."

"It wasn't." Remus agreed carefully, although his voice was ever so carefully pinched, "It was wrong. You didn't deserve that."

"I know." Adrian nearly wheezed out, nodding almost uncontrollably. "...It...It wasn't bad, for a while. I- I brought the book back- I didn't know what would *happen,* b-but the book...and then...then *he* was back and I was- *I* thought I could make him *proud."* Adrian's voice broke, a shiver ran down Remus' spine. "H-he said that I could...I just wanted to be *useful,* Remus. And- and he- *look at what he did to my face!"*

Adrian started quiet, but by the end he was screaming. Remus could faintly hear people scrambling inside, likely ready to burst through the door. Remus could hear the low tones of Tonks, presumably keeping people inside.

The implications of Adrian's screaming were bad. The way he was shaking was even worse.

"A-and now he's coming for me." Adrian continued to sob, eyes glazed and sightless as he was already entering the starts of an anxiety attack, "he's sending Bella and- and they're going to *find me* and I don't want to *go,* and- and he's going to lock me away and I don't *want* to be locked away and he's going to *hurt me* and I *know* now that he- *father's aren't supposed to curse their children!"*

Adrian was shaking his head and Remus could only hold him and hope for the best.

"This- your father…" Remus trailed off, feeling so sickened he had to pause to compose himself. "Is he…"

Adrian only cried harder.

"Adrian, listen to me." Remus shushed him, gently squeezing the arm around Adrian's body slightly tighter to him, "Adrian, you're okay."

Adrian shook his head back and forth, the movement made Remus dizzy just watching.

"No, listen." Remus urged him gently, "would you feel better if I called Dumbledore? I know you may not like him, but I don't think Bellatrix would show if he's around."

Adrian sniffed loudly, "I don't *like* the coot."

Remus smiled thinly, too sad to stop and think of the situation. How had things come this far? How had they fallen apart so quickly. "Who would you like to stay here with you? Who would make you feel better?"

Adrian sniffled wetly; Remus could smell the salt permeate the air.

"...Sirius." Adrian mumbled, confessing it with a white knuckled fist as if he was embarrassed by the confession. "Moody."

"Then I'll call them over and I'll have them stay in the guest room. I know Sirius has been asking about you, would it be alright to have James and Lily here as well?"

Adrian flinched, a full body shiver that spoke volumes. He gave a small instinctual whine, a low whispering coo that Remus had never heard before.

"I don't *want* them." Adrian protested weakly, shaking his head with his eyes screwed tightly closed. "Moony *please."*

Remus swallowed the guilt, "If Skylar is here, they're going to pop in now and then. Until we can relocate Skylar to a safe house, they're going to visit."

"W-why not the...the Black Estate?"

"Dumbledore suspects it's been compromised, it isn't safe even with the spellwork hiding it. We'll be moving Skylar soon, but we need just a little bit longer. A week, maximum."

Adrian shook his head and forcefully shoved his face into Remus' side. "Moony *please."*

"Adrian, he's their child. You can't prevent them from checking in-"

"They can go to *hell."*

Remus twitched, nostrils flaring although he kept his face and breathing regulated. "Adrian, they're good parents."

Adrian *laughed,* as if Remus had said something so funny. "No, no they *killed* their kid."

Remus flinched for real this time. "Adrian, as much as I love you I'm going to have to ask you to refrain from speaking about things you don't know about."

Adrian pulled away as if *burned.* His face twisted up into something furious, the agitated snarl of something wounded.

"*I* don't know what I'm talking about?" Adrian seethed, struggling to his feet. The blanket fell away from him, landing in lumpy layers on the porch. Adrian's legs shook, knobbly knees trembling like a young tree in the wind. "I- I have *every right."*

Remus straightened and his expression shifted into something stony. "That's enou-"

"No!" Adrian screamed, seemingly not caring of the likely audience inside watching them. "I am- I am *sick and tired of this.* They are *shite parents,* and I want to *murder them myself!"*

Remus stood quickly, and although he was taller than the other boy, Adrian didn't let it intimidate him. The frail boy was flushed in fury, the aura around him menacing in a way Remus couldn't explain. The air itself crackled, like the impending chill of a thunderstorm.

"Adrian." Remus clipped out sharply, all too aware of likely the half dozen wands inside, prepared to rush out and stun him. Proclaiming his desire to murder was not smart in any instance, Adrian was no exempt from that. "You *cannot* say things like that."

Adrian sneered, eyes far too bright with a pinprick pupil; terrified and running on adrenaline.

"They *deserve it*!"

"You don't *know* what hap-"

"I deserve *revenge!"*

"They *didn't do anything to you."*

Adrian flinched and reared back, eerily like a snake. In one smooth jolt forward, his hands curled to his sides and his voice warped far too hissing like for a normal human vocal range. Remus could still understand what he said, which made it that more unusual.

"They abandoned me!"

There were birds chirping. Something with a steady chirping noise Remus may have found annoying if he lived there permanently. In that pause, where nothing sounded and Remus couldn't even hear his *heartbeat,* that one bird sang far too loud in his ears.

Adrian was silently panting, far too distraught to truly care. Slowly he crumbled, looking more like a scared small child than a sixteen year old. "I...I wasn't supposed to tell you that."

What? Remus' brain failed to work. It was moving sluggishly, churning molasses and trying to free thoughts from the sticky tangle.

Adrian took one step back, nearly stumbling. "I- I wasn't supposed to say that."

'Abandon him?' Remus thought frantically, blinking uncontrollably in shock. *'I- It can't-'*

Adrian swallowed, the movement stark against the thin skin of his throat. It twisted the scars, stretching and shrinking them with the rapid heaving breaths of his trachea.

Adrian looked well on his way to another panic attack, he had only just recovered from the previous meltdown.

(They had a crowd inside, no doubt they had heard the shouting, but Remus doubted they could have heard everything discussed.)

"Adrian," Remus began slowly, trying to calm himself to not trigger something horrible, "how about we calm down a second. How about you head inside to your room and lay down for a while, I'll bring you some food."

Adrian was swaying dangerously, eyes shifting to heavily dilated. "I- I don't-"

(Remus couldn't think. He was already overwhelmed, he needed time to think and to *figure things out.*)

"It's okay, I'm not going to contact anyone. I'll be up in a minute."

Adrian shakily nodded, not moving even as Remus slowly recovered the thick blanket and wrapped it around the small shoulders. "Let's go inside, Adrian."

Remus moved first, a single glance around once he opened the door sent everyone skittering out of sight. Tonks didn't move, instead she gripped the door and held it open. Waiting only for Adrian to stumble into the doorway before she carefully steered him towards the vacant stairwell.

Remus breathed out a heavy sigh, sagging against the open door exhaustively.

At what point had his life devolved to this? Taking care of a fragile dy- *sick* boy, treating him with as much care as an infant and with the caution of a dragon. Adrian was...Adrian was *dangerous.* If half of what he suspected (and learned from Albus) was true, then the boy already owed years in Azkaban. His unexplained rage against James and Lily was something that had bothered Remus for as long as he knew Adrian. Remus had once suspected it was microaggression since Skylar was an easy target, but Adrian had grown more passive to Skylar and more *aggressive* towards James and Lily.

With what he had just said- Adrian had claimed that somehow, James and Lily had *abandoned* him.

When? How?

The requirements for abandoning a child implied that at some point, they were responsible for that child's well being. James hadn't recognized or known Selwyn, in fact James had mournfully gone on long rants about that *damn Selwyn kid* when he taught at Hogwarts that one year. James was equally startled and a stranger to Adrian when Remus had saved him from Knockturn alley after being cursed.

Now *that* was an entire basket of flobberworms Remus was too tired to think about.

"He's the heir."

Remus jumped, he hadn't heard anyone approach. Skylar was standing there, having come out from hiding. Ron and Hermione were not with him, instead he stood in the center of the floor as if to block Remus' way.

Skylar was...he stood like a statue. Stiff, unmoving and slightly hunched forwards. Eyes wide, he didn't blink and the expression was quickly becoming unsettling.

The snake was coiled around him, draped over his shoulders and around his ribs almost lovingly; Lutain was wearing Skylar.

"Adrian Selwyn is the heir to Slytherin." Skylar spoke, voice somewhat flat although thank *Merlin* he finally blinked. "Lutain told me."

"What else has Lutain told you?" Remus asked slowly, wary as the black snake looked at him silently. It didn't even flicker its tongue.

Skylar's eyes were off, they were muddied and different and *wrong*. The color was- Remus was too far to see-

"Lutain and I have made a deal." Skylar spoke blankly before blinking and looking away, focusing at a corner without actually seeing it. "I'm the Chosen One, after all."

"Lutain, If I give you protection and I carry you with me for as long as you want, can you give me the information I need?"

'Carry me. Cherish me. Protect me.'

"All of that. But I need your help. If you help me, I'll let you use me."

'Deal.'

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Perforate

Chapter Summary

Where Skylar puts a plan into place, Adrian tries to keep things calm, and Skylar inadvertently ruins everything.

Chapter Notes

Yikes, this one is going to be rough for you all

'It's not fair it's not fair I dont I don't understand what what did Crouch-'

Dusk was falling, and Lutain was growing more unsettled by the hour.

The sun had fallen below the horizon, casting a ghostly orange hue to splash against the clouds in a vivid misting of crimson and pumpkin orange. It was beautiful, reflecting off the growing rows of corn and painting dark green leaves to dark shades near black. Speckles of colour on waxy leaves, reminiscent of the frothy spread of blood in a perforated lung.

Skylar felt hazy, as if his brain resembled something more like damp parchment. Wet, distorted, liable to turn to mush under enough pressure. Lutain was constricting, tight along his shoulders and chest with his head resting heavily atop Skylar's skull.

Cerestes. Lutain urged with unmistakable panic, *Cerestes!*

Skylar didn't understand, he had half a mind to swat the snake to the floor.

"Everything alright, mate?" Ron asked lowly, eyeing him from across the bed with cautious eyes.

No, everything wasn't alright.

Hermione worried her lip, looking at Ron with something unspoken.

"Skylar, you *know* you can talk to us." Hermione urged, eyes nearly watering with some sort of restrained emotion. "Something's wrong, isn't it?"

Skylar gave the briefest nod. "Yeah, I don't….I don't know what but something's coming."

Lutain hissed sourly. *Cerestes.*

The same name again, repeating over and over although it had some sort of meaning Skylar didn't know. A meaning he should know. "The snake is repeating Cerestes again."

Hermione's brow furrowed, "like an omen?"

Cerestes! Lutain hissed furiously, sounding desperate as if he was holding something back.

Skylar was *tired* of it. He *knew* Adrian was the heir, something had wormed into his skull and *told* him only hours prior. Since then, he lived in a daze. Unable, and incohesive to the world around him.

"Tell us something new." Skylar spoke bluntly, barely blinking as he was aware of every scale, ever breath of his companion. "Or stop talking entirely."

Lutain's reluctance was nearly tangible. So sour and potent, Skylar could nearly taste it on his tongue.

Mad lady. Lutain whispered quietly. *Soon. I think.*

Skylar inhaled sharply, eyes widening in alarm. "When? Lutain, *when?"*

Lutain twitched, but once the dam opened it was impossible to restrain the tide. *Night.*

Skylar cursed so foul Ron's eyes widened. "Hermione, we- we've got to go."

Hermione paled, but nodded. She stumbled for something, muttering under her breath as she started gathering random objects from around the room. She placed them on the bed hurriedly. A few rolled inwards from Skylar's body weight, resting against his thigh encouragingly.

"Wait, mate." Ron stumbled, clearly baffled by how quickly the atmosphere escalated. "We need details."

Skylar inhaled slowly and turned to look at Lutain with a small glare. "Hear that Lutain? We need details. *Now."*

Lutain managed to somehow look guilty, floundering a few seconds before grudgingly. *This night. Attack. Cerestes. Here.*

That wasn't much to go on, but it was enough for Skylar.

"We're getting that contingency plan going," Skylar bit out, looking at Hermione who already was hauling a nondescript canvas bag from the back of the closet. "Just in case."

Ron nodded without question. "The plan where we go looking for those Horcrux thingies? Or the one where we get to that safehouse? Mate, we can't apparate yet even!"

"I can." Hermione confessed quietly, blushing under the two boys' amazed stares. "Tonks taught me. Honestly! I wanted to prepare just in case and Tonks is surprisingly good at apparating!"

"Huh." Ron blinked without question, "so...which plan?"

Skylar swallowed thickly. "I...I don't know. I think something is coming here- that Cerestes bloke is going to attack here- likely for Selwyn."

"Adrian isn't in the right mind for that." Hermione's lip wobbled, "I- you *saw* him earlier!"

"Shite, that's bad timing." Ron sighed but looked far too tired of the situation in general. "Bloody hell, our parents are going to *murder* us."

Skylar exhaled quietly and knew he couldn't argue that. He had tried sneaking out earlier that summer and was downright terrified that his mother was going to snap his wand with how furious

she had been. Molly Weasley had exploded time and time again over Ron's safety, Skylar didn't know how Hermione's parents were okay with her being there the entire summer.

The problem, was that the parents didn't *understand.* The war was bigger than some...some societal concept of a proper childhood. Skylar couldn't sit back and wait for everything to blow over, the war wasn't going to wait until he was middle aged.

People were *dying,* and it was *his duty* to stop Voldemort. Learning advanced potions or how to do a couple new spells wasn't going to change that fact.

(His parents didn't *understand.* Dumbledore did, that was why he told him about the Horcruxes. That's why he confided in Skylar about them.)

"It doesn't matter what our parents' think." Skylar admitted quietly. His heart hammering in his chest. "If...If everything we know and suspect is *true,* then Voldemort's got a half dozen magical artifacts that're keeping him alive. We have a starting point, we have an idea on what to do and where to look and *we're* the only one that can stop him."

Hermione nodded quietly, although she looked terrified of the prospect. Ron nodded grimly, he had long since understood that.

"Mr. Scamander is going to take care of the basilisk." Skylar continued to explain with a rush, "he and Dumbledore are going to try and stop that thing."

"The rest of the Order I thinks trying to stop the attacks, and figure out what his followers are up to." Ron's brows furrowed as he chewed his lip, "some Gringotts nonsense or something."

"Which means *we* need to find those secret objects." Hermione sighed, "oh I *hate* this."

"On the bright side, we already know about a few." Skylar soothed the two, "Dumbledore let me know his suspicions. He has the one, but he's pretty sure that the snake is one, so is Slytherin's locket and Hufflepuff's goblet."

Lutain snapped his head up, although frustratingly said nothing.

"Any idea where those may be?" Ron asked rhetorically, flopping backwards onto his bed in disbelief. "Congrats, so we have three, Professor Dumbledore has four, we still are missing two then, but those are probably Gryffindor's thing and Ravenclaw's thing."

"Sounds easy." Hermione jokingly added, although her voice was weak. This was looking like a horrible adventure ahead of them. "I hate this, Sky."

Skylar hated it just as much. "I'm going to Floo Dumbledore, let him know that there's likely going to be an attack tonight. Keep packing."

Hermione nodded sagely, sighing down at the bed as if the world was falling apart at her fingertips. "Alright, I need to thank Mr. Scamander for that expansion spell. Truly something amazing."

Skylar was sure that it was.

Lutain tightened slightly, dragging Skylar back to the threat at hand. With one hand, he shushed the snake and the other he patted Hermione's shoulder. "We'll get through this fine, guys."

Hermione shook her head, "Skylar, we don't even know how to *destroy* these Horcruxes!"

Skylar knew. Dumbledore had confided in him why killing the basilisk was now such a priority. Basilisk venom was one of the few things capable of destroying a Horcrux.

(Adrian Selwyn, was a basilisk animagus.)

"Don't worry about that." Skylar smiled weakly, "I uh, I have that covered."

What would Adrian Selwyn possibly desire enough to help them?

(Lutain and Skylar both could only think of one thing.)

They appeared like lightning bugs, barely visible through the growing stalks of corn. Floating a pale blue, they circled around the house like wolves.

Remus peered out the window, spotting them instantly and growing tense. Tonks glanced at him quietly, then at the fireplace hesitantly.

"Go get Albus." Remus murmured, face stony.

"I- Adrian said only Sirius and old Moody." Tonks nearly whispered back. "I don't want to upset him."

Remus licked his lip worriedly, "I think it's Bellatrix. Tonks, *please,* get Albus."

Tonks chewed her lower lip before she looked at the fireplace with a kink in her eyebrows. "I-...I can't. I'm sorry, I don't want to break Adrian's trust."

Remus turned to look at her directly, pausing and nearly stepping backwards at the strangely determined expression on Tonks' face.

"Tonks-..."

"No, let me…" Tonks inhaled and let it out slowly. "Remus Lupin, I understand *completely* where you're coming from, but just as much as Adrian is *your* child he is also *mine*.I know that this seems….*bad,* but if Adrian said not to get Albus then by Merlin's name I'm *not* going to just go get him!" Tonks had a slight flush, her eyes wide but Remus hadn't seen her look so certain in his life.

Instantly his face softened, "Tonks...I- I just want him to be safe."

Tonks wrung her hands with a small sigh, "Remus, he's practically an adult now and he's not the best, but he's *still alive.* Merlin, I have more trust that he'll be okay than *you* being okay."

Remus chuckled softly, although he didn't look any less tense. Tonks smiled knowingly. She lifted on her tiptoes, drawing her face close to his jawline. "I'll go wake Moody and Sirius, okay?" She whispered gently, giving a couple pats on Remus' shoulder as she sauntered off in the near dark. Remus didn't realise he was smiling until long after she left. Moments like those reminded Remus of just how fond he was of Tonks.

The flickering lights were growing larger, closer. It wasn't good. There were many, likely five or six shapeless forms in the corn.

"Great," Remus sighed through his nose, tense in the dark where he squinted out over the kitchen sink. "Five Death Eaters, and Bellatrix Lestrange."

"Hate that bitch." Someone grumbled behind him quietly, Sirius scampering through the dark

carefully and hanging low out of sight. Sirius blended in well with the night, practically invisible even where he loosely brushed against Remus' side. "Five you think?"

Remus squinted out once again, his eyesight was generally superior to others in the dark. "I'm fairly sure. If it's Bellatrix, it's likely the other two Lestranges with her."

"Rabastan and Rodolphus." Sirius grunted back quietly, "yeah, Selwyn talked about them a bit. They'd likely come with. Selwyn mentioned Rowle too."

"Rowle? Damn, he's a good dueler." Remus grimaced slightly, holding his breath as someone knew with a limp joined them in the dark.

"Good, you're already here." Moody grumbled, miraculously quiet as he too stared out, magical eye rolling around. "How many?"

"Six total," Sirius repeated back, "Bellabitch for sure, we're guessing Rabastan and Rodolphus Lestrange also, possibly Rowle, but we don't know about the final two."

Moody gave a small frown, "Greyback. I can see him out there, didn't think we'd spot him but I see that mangy dog. Not Rowle, the gait's all wrong."

"Great," Sirius huffed under his breath, "Tonks is sending the delay to Albus, if we don't check in again he's coming over with Shacklebolt. Somehow he already knew, there's a raid over by Cardiff right now, but Tonks has got him updated."

Remus' mouth flickered into a small smile. He had underestimated Tonks yet again.

Sirius gave a small chuckle, a huge wordless grin spreading across ear to ear. His eyes were sparkling. "Moony, you're *adorable."*

Remus flushed and drew his wand with a pointed look.

Sirius nearly wheezed with how he tried to keep his laughing silent.

"Oh Merlin, you killed him." Tonks whispered, sliding back into the small group. Her hair was as black as Sirius' and for once Remus could see the family resemblance.

"Not yet, cousin." Sirius grinned, his teeth white in the dark.

"Alright." Moody grumbled quietly under his breath, "This is the plan. I'll take Greyback, I can spot him better in the dark than you folk."

"I'll take Bellatrix." Remus murmured quietly, causing Moody to shake his head sharply.

"No, none of that." Moody growled out, eye rolling around. "You're too big a target against her, and you don't have formal training. You take on Rabastan and Rodolphus, don't worry about taking them out, just keep them distracted enough. Tonks, you're on support for Remus or Sirius depending on who needs it."

"Great, I get the bitch." Sirius grinned, rolling his head and popping his neck a few times. "And by that, I'm just distracting her until Greyback is down, then we switch and she's the main target?"

"You know it." Moody grumbled with a rare grin, "Ready?"

From behind the group, a new voice spoke up in the dark. "No. I'm walking out there. You're staying in here."

In the center of the kitchen Adrian Selwyn stood wearing a black robe he likely stole from Hermione (it was quite small but fit him better than anyone else's would), with his eyes sharp and nearly glowing in the dark.

Remus opened his mouth to protest before Moody lifted one hand to demand silence.

"...You expecting them?" Moody inquired with a small squint, jerking his head in the direction of outside.

Adrian tilted his neck slightly, a large black stain vanishing from the side of his throat in the imprint of scales. "I heard. They're here to pick me up."

Moody's lip curled in annoyance, "You taking that bloody snake with you?"

Adrian twitched slightly, his face unreadable."No. Skylar...likes him."

Remus would have to address the way Adrian's body twitched, as if the admittance hurt him.

"You'll walk right out there, and leave with Lestrange?" Moody asked with a frown, visibly skeptic, "we're supposed to trust you?"

Adrian rubbed his upper arm uncomfortably, "The- Voldemort's currently based at Rowle's manor. Near Kirkwall. It's warded against muggles but nothing against wizards, it would show up on ministry scans although its supposedly abandoned."

Remus inhaled sharply, Tonks blinked in surprise.

Sirius had the strangest reaction yet. He lowered himself to his knees, now lower in height than Adrian himself. Sirius' face looked sad but he extended one hand with a small grimace. "Hey, kid. Look, we never got along amazing but...I don't know. I grew up with arses and really, after all this shites over you need to come over. I respect you kid, hang in there. Helps coming eventually."

Adrian's eyes were wide and he genuinely looked taken off guard. "I- Black?"

"Sirius." Sirius quickly corrected with a small smile, "You're not a bad kid, Adrian. I mean, shites been bad for you but in a lot of ways you're *so* much better than I was with all that pureblood family crap. Maybe after this, we'll go wreck some more couches, eh?"

Adrian's eyes were wet, but he nodded and accepted the outstretched hand, shaking it slightly. "Alright. I need to go."

"Selwyn." Moody grumbled, nodding towards the front door, "first sign of trouble, we're coming out."

Adrian gave a small nod before he snuck past and paused in front of Remus and Tonks.

Tonks was smiling but there was no way to disguise how heartbroken she looked.

Remus wasn't faring better, especially when Adrian focused his attention on him and only him.

"Remus…" Adrian paused, voice lingering between them before dragging off hoarsely. It sounded pained, accompanied by the way his throat felt thick. "I-..."

Remus smiled weakly, "It's okay." *It isn't.*

Adrian shook his head slightly, "I- the…" Adrian exhaled shakily and his hands curled into fist, "I-

it's Harry."

Remus blinked in confusion, opening his mouth before Adrian looked at him with desperate seriousness. "My- my name. It's Harry."

Harry. Har-

Oh.

Oh.

Remus was frozen in shock, and in that moment Adrian slipped past him and out of the front door. Leaving like a whisper, unspoken and hanging in the air between them.

The door banged shut behind him, and in that moment the darkness swallowed his shadow until he was gone.

Across the yard, a single bobbing light darted forward.

"There's Bellatrix." Moody grumbled under his breath, watching attentively as slowly a dark figure made its way over the grass in the dark.

Sirius grimaced and inched towards the door, "I don't like this. It's too calm, they're too spread out."

"I know." Moody grumbled, squinting before his mouth curled and he shook his head, "Get Albus. It's a trap, they're going to attack the house."

"Mr. Newt put up wards on the whole house before Adrian got here," Tonks supplied, voice low as she rattled off the information, "It'll hold all the way up to Fiendfyre and blasting curses."

"Remind me to give that man my thanks." Moody nodded, slowly making his way to the door. "Sirius, think you can get around them and flank them?"

Sirius didn't reply more than shifting smoothly into a lean black dog, sleek and invisible in the night. He knew which side Greyback was on, he would go around the other way.

Moody opened the door slowly, being sure the hinges didn't creak. Tonks in return grabbed a paperweight, other hand filled with floo powder ready to send the waiting signal. Remus hung back with Moody, ready to burst out with wands raised the moment Sirius made the signal, or Bellatrix attacked.

They didn't have to wait long at all.

Adrian walked over the grass slowly, hearing it crunch under his feet.

He knew where to walk, something dragging and pushing him further out to where the corn was towering high. His breaths were loud, puffs that he forced in and out as each step lolled him further.

The stolen robe was itchy, scratching on his exposed arms where his shirt didn't cover. It was a miracle his trousers could be drawn tight enough.

He saw the light, the main glowing one that was rapidly approaching. He could detail faintly the chaotic black hair.

"Bella!" Adrian shouted, knowing his voice was slightly hoarse. The light wavered slightly, before it bobbed and the woman took off in a sprint.

He almost clued in too late that the woman would have tackled him to the ground. He skittered aside, fumbling jerkily to avoid her sharp nailed grab, well aware of how disastrous his blood spilled would be.

Bellatrix was suddenly *there,* face gaunt and crazed and teeth bared in a snarl (had he once thought it was a smile?) and everything Adrian didn't want.

"My *baby."* She cooed, swaying in place as she fumbled in her cloak, yanking out a wand Adrian hadn't seen in a long while. "Your wand!"

(Something about it felt *wrong*, to take it so casually when he had no memory of where Sirius put his other.)

"Thank you." Adrian nodded back, taking the wood back in an unpracticed grip. Bellatrix's snarl was uncomfortable.

"I missed you!" She chirped like something foul, "You're so pretty and tall now!"

(He was disgusting and stunted.)

Adrian didn't say anything, he only placed his wand in his sleeve in the cheap sewn in wand holster. It was bound to slip later on, he just needed his hands free to avoid Bellatrix's talons. The corn was swaying high around them.

"How did you find me?" Adrian asked flatly, not bothering to fake a pleasantry. It was dark enough he doubted that the woman would see his facial details well, even with the lumos.

"Oh!" Bella's voice chirped like a wren. "Cissy! I took her brat and he found out about those blood traitors! Knew where you'd likely be!"

(Merlin, had Bellatrix always been so...*batty?)*

"Draco?" Adrian translated after a second, pausing to gather his thoughts. "He's...here?"

That would be a revelation for the blonde. Adrian almost wished he had seen the other's face when Bellatrix stormed into his house.

"Yep!" Bella nearly giggled, spinning around to face the blackened field, "*Draco!"*

She shrieked hoarsely, loud and arrogant with the slumbering house behind them. With this level of carelessness, how had she never been taken down before?

(She had, he almost forgot about Azkaban and what it had done to her.)

The corn parted after a second, fumbling under clunky footsteps stirring soil and mice. Adrian's eyes glowed in the face of the lumos spell, practically shoved right in front of him. The yellow brightened eerily, as if he was something beyond human anymore.

Draco on the other hand, looked *terrified.*

His skin was pale, translucent yet not to the point of sickly. Stressed more likely, eyes nearly bulging with the effort of each forced breath. A fake calm to not impede his movements and functioning, a terrible coping mechanism.

Adrian felt his mouth curling, the one half grin he spent years practicing in the mirror to *just* look unsettling enough. Instinctive and dry, twisting the scars across his face until it looked painful.

"Hi Draco." Adrian chirped, the effort falling flat as his tone didn't sound nearly chipper enough. He sounded tired, exhausted and ready to be taken away. "Sorry about Bella. She get impatient."

Bella *snarled,* and without hesitation Adrian turned and drew his wand, pointing it between her eyes with a twisted grimace on his face. "Bella, *shut up."*

Either out of respect for his father, or out of admiration for his sudden maturity, Bellatrix fell back with no noise. Draco's nostrils flared with the force of his inhales and exhales. If not for the careful regulation, Adrian was sure the blonde would have been hyperventilating.

"Hi." Draco croaked out, his voice breaking and fragmenting to where it was almost unrecognizable.

Adrian nodded out towards the others staying hidden in the field. "Who else did you bring? Rodolphus and Rabastan also. Was that Fenrir I heard?"

Bellatrix took two steps forward, hunching over and resting her boney chin on his shoulder as if he was okay with it. (He wasn't.)

"What good ears." She crooned happily, "That silly dog wanted to come light some fires. That *bastard traitor* is here too."' Bellatrix sneered looking annoyed. "He called you *lackluster."*

That left Adrian blinking in surprise, "I- Snape? Not Rowle?"

"Off doing something. Paper pushers or something boring." Bellatrix dismissed without a care. Anything Rowle was doing was likely incredibly important. Draco swallowed thickly.

"Right, well." Adrian sighed, running one hand across the back of his neck, "did you bring my cloak also?"

Bellatrix grinned and dug around in her cloak with shaking fingers. Her breath smelled foul, she was a marionette with rusted gears. Adrian despised her, something about her...*existence,* was rubbing him wrong.

Bellatrix tugged it out with a flourish, the long tassels along the bottom refused to abide to gravity and floated leisurely after the fabric, unsettling and ethereal in all the wrong ways. It was terribly ironic, how his appearance was made to match something so foul.

Draco paled once more, looking even more horrified as Bellatrix lowered herself to one knee to assist Adrian into it, then sinking lower into the dirt and mud humbly.

The cloak was cold in the way silk was, gentle and soothing against the irritated spots of skin where the borrowed cheap cloak scratched him. It was luxury and gentle and Adrian felt like he was burning in it.

"My Lord." Bellatrix hissed with a giggle, huffing out breaths of poorly restrained laughter as Draco *whimpered.*

"Stop that." Adrian snapped, glaring at Bellatrix as his irritation rose. "I was never given that title. Let's go already. Merlin *knows* I'm going to get enough shite from this." Adrian muttered under his breath, walking past Bella without looking back. "And Draco? Try *not* to be an arse, because this time, someone else *will* kill you."

Draco gulped and shook his head, "I- I'm *sorry."*

Adrian paused, and turned to look at him. Half hidden under the cloak, green and yellow sunburst staring with a look of undisguised rage.

"No." Adrian spoke, short and flat. "No, you *aren't* sorry. You don't want to die, and now you realize that I *can* kill you."

From behind him, someone gave a huffing gruff laugh, swaggering through plants with a hunched position. Adrian didn't look, he was practically untouchable now.

"You don't have that courage yet, *lord."* The man growled, a low bass rumble that Adrian placed at once.

"Greyback." Adrian sighed, this time taking a step to turn and face the man directly. "So we meet. I've heard a lot about you."

He didn't look how Adrian expected him to. He looked more...more like an animagus than a werewolf, somehow his features were morphed and emphasized even in human form. His teeth were long, canines poking out from his upper lip like some sort of eldritch horror. He was *covered* in grey scar tissue, his eyes golden despite the full moon not near. Ink traced over his exposed ears, the illusion of points and fur tracing down his neck. Adrian couldn't see his hands, but they were likely long and pointed.

"I haven't heard about you much." Greyback laughed, a low chuffing noise as he approached leisurely, hunching over and looking more impressive by the second.

"I'm something of a secret weapon, *dog."* Adrian coldly retorted. He was well aware of how Draco was *shaking* beside him. Obviously terrified out of wits end.

"Me?" Greyback's bushy eyebrow lifted as he *finally* got to the point where he was nearly walking on his *hands,* prowling towards Adrian savagely. "You look more like the Lord's *lap dog,* brat. How I'd love to sink my teeth into *you."*

If Lutain were here, this was when he would rise. Hissing and dancing and exposing his dazzlingly yellow belly and long fangs. Lutain *wasn't* there, no matter how Adrian looked at it.

Adrian on the other hand, he had fangs himself.

"Oh really?" Adrian asked, already starting to grin as he focused and tried to shift *ever* so slowly. It wasn't as slow and as careful as he wanted- he could feel his hair shifting oddly as the plume began to rise like a sail. His eyes itched in the weird cloudy yellow they always turned, *glowing* in the dark.

His teeth were sharpening, the large carnivorous rows of backwards hooks; he nearly stumbled to force the change to simply...stop.

"Take a bite out of *me."* Adrian *purred,* all of the pent up aggression and frustration coming through in the morbid amusement over the situation. His words, still English, held a very heavily accented hiss.

Draco whimpered quietly, although not as much as Greyback's full body *flinch* backwards. Instinctively repelled by the basilisk, even without his eyes showing.

(He never knew how to get his eyelids to lift. He'd have to ask Adalonda about it when everything

was over.)

"Well, look at you." Greyback rumbled lowly, staying low to the ground in a reluctant submissive pose. "Looks like my runt *did* house you in."

Bellatrix snapped her head around ,eyes wide in unmistakable disgust. "Excuse me? Your *runt?"*

"Y-yes." Draco stuttered up, clearing his throat as he tried to summon words, "he- Selwyn's been w-with Remus Lupin, the d- *werewolf."*

Greyback snapped halfheartedly at Draco, causing the boy to flinch away.

Bellatrix, well, she had little to stop her from any slurs.

"A *filthy monster?"* she practically screamed, "taking care of *my Adrian?"*

Oh, Draco had really done it now.

"I change my mind!" Bellatrix hollered, pulling her wand and spinning towards the sleeping house, "*Confringo!"*

The curse *flew,* then impacted some sort of invisible barrier and exploded sharply with a rattling bang like fireworks. Anyone who had still been sleeping wouldn't be anymore.

Adrian sighed through his nose, half out of anxiety and half out of frustration. Why couldn't they just *leave* already?

"What?" Bellatrix guffawed, pausing and staring at her wand as if it was the flaw.

"There's a ward, you *buffoon.* If they hadn't grown suspicious of Mr. Selwyn's absence, you've essentially blown all semblance of cover." Someone drawled from behind, slipping through the corn to join the group. Snape was being escorted on either side by Rabastan and Rodolphus.

"Kid," Rodolphus grunted with a small nod, his brother had a small grin as Snape flinched slightly at the sight of Adrian.

Oh, this was deliciously hilarious.

"So." Adrian paused, pointedly staring at Snape with a rather unimpressed look. "I heard you called me *lackluster."*

Snape had a phenomenal grasp on his expression. Nothing shifted, although Adrian could tell that underneath it all, he *was* unsettled.

"My apologies." Snape clipped back, but made no further advancement to grovel.

Adrian frowned, "That's not very...apologetic."

Remus had told him it was rude to pry into people's head, but considering that this was *Snape* of all people, he felt he was allowed that right.

Snape grunted slightly and his legs began to buckle. Flashes drifted too quickly through Adrian's head, images and pictures too disjointed and frazzled to clearly be seen or deciphered. Snape's head was chaotic and torn, shredded with a disarray of thoughts and ideas and lies and truths that it was *impossible* to see.

Adrian pulled back roughly with no care for being nice. It was relieving to have no care of subtlety, when he pressed past Sirius' eyes he was so gentle it made his hands shake. Snape, he tore free like a barbed hook from a fish's cheek.

"That was disappointing." Adrian sighed, although all three Lestrange's didn't seem to comprehend what had happened. With one look, Snape was left recovering undignified. Draco flinched once again, Greyback cackled.

"Well." Bellatrix huffed with a frown, "*I* want to blow up that house. And slit my cousins *throat."*

Without further prompting, she spun and cast Fiendfyre.

"*Shite!"* Draco hissed under his breath, throwing himself on the ground as the chaotic dark magic spun and burned and spread far too quickly and untamed for even Adrian's taste. It rose and fought against the barrier, singing and coiling like a wildfire quickly spreading outwards. Even if it couldn't break the local ward, it could trap it in a hurricane of smoke and eventually choke out the occupants.

Adrian fell to his knees as Greyback *leapt* over him, claws just shy of piercing his cloak. A second later the werewolf was running towards the building, howling oddly in his human voice.

Snape cursed and stood, trying to throw off the restraining hands of the Lestrange brothers. Draco stayed on the ground in shock.

"Shite," Adrian hissed under his breath, running his hands through his hair and dislodging his cloak.

Bellatrix on the other hand, spun and started gouging out the earth with huge crevices all while blasting at the ward with darker and darker curses. The bangs were getting louder until the shock waves were so hard Adrian felt his ears pop.

A second later, and something *slammed* into Rodolphus and Rabastan, sending them sailing towards the ground. Adrian didn't miss the way Snape grabbed Draco and took off into the fields out of sight.

Instead, Rodolphus screamed as a large black dog bit into his arm, spilling blood into the air.

"No!" Bellatrix screamed, spinning around and pointing her wand at Sirius who took up a terrifying snarl. His teeth were pink and dripping froth, his body invisible.

A second later, spells were flying from the direction of the house.

Adrian hit the ground and rolled, trying to keep under the fray as Bellatrix countered with more and more violent spells. Rabastan recovered and sent Sirius flying, he shifted back halfway in the air to land sprawled on the ground just shy of the fire.

"Why does *everything* involving you," Sirius shouted face first into the ground, "involve *bloody fire."*

Bellatrix screamed and Moody joined in, deflecting her curses and cursing as Greyback lunged at him, nearly removing his one good eye.

Just as Rodolphus nearly sent a cutting curse into Sirius, Tonks flew out from *nowhere* and sent a shield up, deflecting the shield towards Bellatrix.

"You look like someone who licks toes!" Tonks screeched at Rabastan, causing the man to pause in downright bafflement.

Sirius sprang up and sent a blasting hex, nailing the man's hip and projected him across the field. "Cousin, if *that's* your smack talk, we need to work on it." Sirius grinned in response, shielding a haywire spell.

Of course, all good things could never last.

Adrian had expected them to leave quickly, but Bellatrix would not ever pass the opportunity to take shots at what she herself was angry with.

Adrian had thought that she was simply furious with Remus, in his care and adoption of him from under her hands. He thought that her rage and wrath and the relentless curses were simply for dramatics.

The door to the house slammed open, and lo and behold, Skylar Potter with Lutain coiled around his throat stood in the doorway with a determined expression.

Adrian inhaled sharply, eyes wide as he struggled to his feet and screamed in Parseltongue *"Lutain! No!"'*

Of course, he didn't listen.

Skylar and Lutain leapt through the flames, clumsily shielding to get through. It was a miracle the boy could shield at all. Tonks spotted the brown haired boy and started cursing under her breath, her vulgarity a sharp contrast to the playful sass from before.

Adrian clutched his wand and rose, spitting out a deflection spell to clash with what was likely lethal.

"Skylar!" Adrian hissed, stumbling his way over the grass and countering the flames with his wand for once, "do you have a *death wish?"*

"No!" Skylar heaved for breath, shifting without thought to press his back against Adrian's. "I can't let Bellatrix get away!"

"What the-" Adrian honestly stumbled, his brain short circuiting over the sheer stupidity of what the boy had said. "Have you ever stopped and thought for *one second* in your life?"

Lutain hissed, pressing his scales around as he looped his coils around both Skylar and Adrian, a living chain to tie them together. *"He's not as smart as you."*

Adrian snorted and Skylar huffed sourly.

"Shut up, you garden hose." Skylar panted out, yelping as a stunner came far too close. "I'm plenty smart!"

"Wait-" Adrian flinched in alarm, "you- did you just *understand him?"*

"Duck!" Skylar screamed, reaching behind him aimlessly to grab Lutain (and Adrian's throat) and pull them to the ground.

Just in time for Fenrir Greyback to leap from the burning haze and smoke and press Skylar to the ground with one massive clawed hand.

Skylar gasped, inhaling hoarsely in panic as his breathing cut off.

Adrian inhaled in alarm, Lutain didn't respond to Skylar's wordless pleas.

"Skylar!" Remus shouted, not at all happy but desperate under it all. Adrian could understand that- shite was he supposed to *save* Skylar?

A curse flew through the air, and hit Remus' side with dangerous precision. The man paused, lurching and gagging as he dropped to the ground, seizing.

Bellatrix grinned with blood pooling down a split lip, her wand trailed on Remus' prone body.

Adrian's hearing faded out. He didn't realise he was screaming until the soreness of his throat got to him.

He stood wobbly, at an angle as he trailed his wand in the air pointed at Bellatrix. The sudden shift of the battlefield triggered Lutain's hissing, the werewolf nearly yipping in his haste to get away.

Adrian turned on Bellatrix, hand still as stone and entire existence shaking.

"You-" Adrian seethed, taking a few steps. The battlefield quieted, drawn to a hasty and tense stalemate as Adrian slowly stalked his way across the field.

Remus wasn't moving.

Adrian saw *red.*

"He was *mine!"* Adrian *screamed,* spittle flying in an enraged froth. "He was *mine* and you- *you-..."*

Bella made a small noise of surprise and confusion, lifting both hands upwards as she stepped backwards in alarm. "Adrian? I-."

"He was *mine!"*

"I- I am yours too!" Bellatrix countered, blinking quickly and stumbling, "I- I'm yours, my Lord!"

My Lord. That was all he would ever be to her.

She wasn't a mother, she was a weapon in the war that he was now (and always would be, thanks to her) *trapped in.*

Bellatrix Lestrange, his *bitch of a caretaker,* had just *killed the only family he loved.*

Over it all, Tonks was *screaming,* sobbing and crying and Sirius was roughly holding her back. Skylar was on the ground, his *bloody hero complex had killed him.*

No. Bellatrix was the one to curse him. Bellatrix was the one to-

(A million years ago, Luna had sat on the bridge and watched finches play in the gorge aside the castle. *'Do you think the birds know, that the earth with gorge on them when they decide to stop flying?'*)

"You're right." Adrian spoke. Voice flat, a monotone that left her paling. "You are mine to do with as I wish."

(How similar to his father did he sound? Did she know what was coming?)

"An eye for an eye." Adrian bristly laughed, holding his wand aloft. There would be no coming back, but in the end (because of her), there was nothing worth coming back to.

A tooth, for a tooth.

"Avada Kedavra."

The spell flew, as bright green as his eyes.

Bellatrix fell dead to the ground.

Click here to go to my Tumblr for early content and to get questions answered fast

Click here for all fanart for this story

Pain

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian suffers, and Skylar understands everything has a consequence

Chapter Notes

Thanks to Ahuuda who helped an insane amount with the political and economic details.
Also, check the very bottom of the chapter for the link to the fanart, and now the Discord server! I'm on it frequently, and I give out spoilers far to easily.

I'll make you proud I'll make you so proud father love me I'll make you so proud love me I'll be useful I'm useful I'm USEFUL.'

They said that he was stabilized, somehow suspended in a coma as his body struggled to repair itself. Blissfully unaware, as his organs and functions chugged along like a rusted steamboat making its way upstream. They didn't know what would happen during the full moon, how his wolf form would manifest under the heavy potions and medical spells. They didn't know, and it was Skylar's fault.

They told him it wasn't his fault, that it was coincidence. That it was *Bellatrix Lestrange's* fault, her body removed from the ground where it had dropped heavily.

She never would have sent the curse if it wasn't for him, she never would have actually *hit* Remus if he hadn't…

His mother, his father...they told him again and again that it *wasn't his fault.*

Skylar had begun to view the world differently, see the shades and shadows and the *hopelessness* of the world. The cruel twisted concept that in the end, everything was likely rotten.

Remus was in a suspended coma, unlikely to wake, because of Skylar Potter's childish desire to *save everyone.*

"Lutain," Skylar spoke flatly, staring out the window of the new safe house. Hundreds of miles away, isolated and overcast with thick clouds like sheep wool. "You're a dark artifact. They others don't realize what you can do, can they?"

Lutain didn't move, leisurely sprawled across the brunet's shoulders as if the boy was now his. *No.*

Skylar knew now that Lutain was much more than the others thought, much more dangerous than even Dumbledore had thought. Maybe if Dumbledore had found the ring earlier- maybe if the ring

was as...*large* as Lutain, he would have known.

(If Voldemort had split his soul so many times, how small was the fragment in the ring? How sentient was it? How much did it influence the Headmaster?)

Lutain was a creature of his own, powered by half of Adrian's soul. He had memories, thoughts, an ability to think and formulate ideas on his own that was much more terrifying than others likely believed.

Skylar believed the good in everyone, that deep at heart, everyone would choose the right thing.

Lutain had shown him that what others considered the right thing, was something cruel indeed.

"You know Adrian better than anyone," Skylar's lip twitched into a grimace, a mockery of his once carefree smiles. "Cerestes, Lord Voldemort's *son.* You know him, what he hates and how he thinks."

Lutain dragged his tail closer, his tail caressing Skylar's collar bone through his shirt.

"Adrian doesn't know about Horcruxes, are you going to tell him?" Skylar asked bluntly.

Lutain's tongue flickered through the air, *perhaps.*

Skylar nodded as if that made sense. "You're having me kill the Basilisk because it hurt Adrian. Adrian k-killed Bellatrix, do you know what's going to happen to him now?"

Lutain hissed, recoiling slightly. Skylar felt it, he felt the low simmering pain and longing and desperation for *'was this the right thing?'*

"Adrian's going to be hurt, badly." Skylar spoke, his mouth dry like it was filled with salty crackers. His tongue moved without thinking, without his own control, "his father will hurt him."

Will he have more scars? Will he be so harmed he can't tell what's there anymore?

"I want to make another deal." Skylar hung his head, feeling a deep resignation settle into his bones. "Not with you, with Adrian."

Lutain didn't move. *How?*

Skylar didn't even blink. "You're half his soul, aren't you?"

Nagini kept him company, watching him choke on his own vomit on the floor.

His body seized, twitching and contracting reflexively. His mind was an exposed wire, snapping and crackling unwillingly. His knee had popped outwards when he smashed it against the floor, it hadn't been cracked back in.

His stomach clenched, contracting harshly and against his will vomit spilled from the corner of his mouth. His jaw had been open, mouth gasping wetly for breaths. A mixture of tears, snot, and bile burned against the cheek, pressed into the floor.

Somewhere past the point of rationality, cognitive function fired far too quick and unprepared to really leave Adrian in the present.

He was suffering, agonizing in all senses he had.

Did pain count as a sense? Pain was as important to him as sight or taste or smell ever would be. Touch relied heavily on pain, taste distinguished spice from sweet. Pain in eyes determined pressure, pain in nose determined if blood would swiftly follow.

Did stimuli have to *always* exist to be considered a sense? If Adrian closed his eyes, he would still *see.* He couldn't choose to...*not hear.* Was that what distinguished what was, and what was *not* considered a primary sense?

Whether sensation was there or whether it wasn't, pain *always* existed.

Pain was relative, pain was unique to an individual. Pain taught him in sugary whispers that *'pain is yours, and you exist.'* Thought could be achieved by anything, thought could come in the mind of a conjured dove.

I suffer, therefore I am.

Adrian laughed, the noise barely heard from his wrecked vocal chords. The air puffed his cheeks, caused the pool of fluids to bubble against his face.

His hands contracted into agonizing claws, unable to respond to his brain's desperate cry to *stop!*

Was this what drove Bellatrix to madness? Was this the ultimate cause of her demise?

How ironic, Adrian thought lazily, barely comprehending his own thoughts, *that I feel the same.*

A whine broke from Adrian's mouth, something primitive and animal and heaving as his ribs ground sharply.

"I didn't say you were permitted to speak." His father spoke coldly, sitting on his throne above Adrian. "Crucio."

Pain was something odd to explain. Often, it would be linked to a physical object, to a part of you that was somehow damaged or could be isolated. A pain in his knee, a toothache from a molar. Pain in that sense, was a physical condition.

But pain could be...there was nothing *wrong* with Adrian, after Luna died. He hadn't been struck or wounded, yet he hurt in a primal way impossible to ever explain. An experience, not constrained by physical limitations.

Torture, was something different. Pain didn't explain it, it was something...something which *transcended* who Adrian was as a person. It reached beyond, puncturing through flesh and muscle into his mind and senses into his existence itself.

It was impossible to remember pain, it was impossible to recall the precise *sensation* of pain. It was something humans couldn't do, a protection (or a weakness?) of the soul itself. Crucio was different, it wasn't bound by the rules of mind and body.

It changed his perception itself, it twisted and tugged in all the ways where Adrian couldn't determine what was *him* and what was *suffering.* There was no wound to isolate, to try and distract himself from. There was no memory untouched, no moment of laughter he could try and recall to make it easier. His concept of time itself was forgotten, what could be one minute of agony blurred and distorted until what was a minute? What was an hour, a day, *a week?*

His identity, his entity, his *existence* itself was this sensation of-

It wasn't discomfort. It wasn't irritation or soreness or...Adrian couldn't remember. Stubbing his toe or chopping his toe off would be preferable, the sharp burn that he could *see* and *comprehend.*

He would gladly watch Remus fall again, watch and feel the moment something inside of him snapped and left him with the crippling breathless *loneliness.*

He would rather anything else a thousand times over, because Crucio was nothing like that. Crucio was pain in all ways an umbrella term was for something indescribable.

Crucio was the opposite of reality, of existence. The moment the curse touched him, the abstraction of actuality rebelled and flipped until all that Adrian *was,* was cessation.

(A temporary or complete stopping; a discontinuance of Adrian himself.)

Nothing is real. You aren't real.

The curse ended. Adrian existed, he was alive and life was real. His body hurt, his mind hurt, he *hurt.*

(Adrian wanted to laugh, hysterical and crying because was it over? Was it *actually* over? Had he snapped? Had his mind cracked until even this was just a figment of his imagination?)

"Bellatrix was one of my closest supporters. You killed her, and you have *nothing to say?*"

"What is there to say?" Adrian choked out, resisting the giggle that wormed from his cracked ribs and hot breath. "What would you like me to say next?"

"*Crucio."*

When it ended, Adrian was crying something between laughter and ruin.

"*Why* did you kill Bellatrix?"

Adrian lolled his head, twitching on the ground like something dead. "She touched what was mine."

His father paused, unbridled fury in his eyes. His wand was pointed at Adrian, unwavering in a strong determined grip. "Bellatrix, was *mine."*

Adrian laughed into the ground, unable to raise to his knees. "Aren't I also?"

(Was this why Bellatrix always laughed? Nothing was *real?*)

I suffer, therefore I am.

Logic returns in the absence of crisis.

Adrian *screamed,* clawing at the walls because then the aftershocks had a source for his brain to label.

Do you know what it is like, to be unmade?

"As you can see...Bellatrix has..*failed,* to return to us."

Adrian kept his body limp, sprawled gracelessly like an obedient lap dog. Coiled and loose, the flare along the back of his skull flat to his scales.

"She failed in obeying orders of those above her," Voldemort sighed wistfully, not at all displaying the rage and ferocity he had demonstrated days before. "Bellatrix was punished, her life forfeit."

The Death Eaters were quiet, sweat and fear thick in the air like a scented candle. Nagini shifted along the back wall, securing the door for anyone wishing to make a speedy escape.

"I presume you have reports to present." Voldemort drawled, curling one finger as a nameless follower stepped forward humbly.

"Yes, my Lord." The unknown man murmured under his breath, bowing so low his mask near came loose. "We have secured a Pius Thicknesse in position, willingly he has joined our cause. Amelia Bones is still refusing to reduce the force of the magical law enforcement division, she has been proving...difficult."

Voldemort waved his hand dismissively, neither impressed or disappointed with the news. Adrian's head spun, who were these people? He hadn't ever heard of them- the magical law enforcement division was a department in the Ministry of Magic. Had his father actually *infiltrated* it? That department ran all of the aurors, the chief force that *hunted* his father's supporters.

"What of the Improper Use of Magic Department?" Voldemort asked calmly, looking pointedly at one rounded woman, features disguised under the mask.

"Malfalda Hopkirk has been placed under the Imperius," the woman spoke, voice warbling ever so slightly with her anxiety, "the locations of magical use is now in our control. We have extended the blind eye to various areas to disguise our movements, my Lord."

The- they had somehow infiltrated *the trace?*

Merlin, what had happened in Adrian's absence?

Slowly, the names began accumulating.

The Office of the Magical Law Enforcement Squad, which generally covered minor law offenses; under control of influenced. The Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office, Perkins (the director) was a supporter. The Detection and Confiscation of Counterfeit Defensive Spells and Protective Objects had been recently constructed by Rufus Scrimgeour, who was proving a slight challenge.

They had worms on the third floor of the Ministry of Magic. Festering maggots that had gnawed deep into every office in the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes. The Accidental Magic Reversal Squad, tasked with containing and reversing accidental magic or unexpected magical effects like splinching; the *entire squad* was influenced with bribery and threats. The Obliviator Headquarters, for Merlin's sake *the director was in the throne room with them.*

The Muggle-Worthy Excuse Committee that explained and handled public relations with muggle accidents was working overtime and reporting to nothing. How many muggle massacres had happened without news reaching the light of day? How many people tortured and killed? Without *the minister* even knowing?

The Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures- how else did they gain the werewolf packs? The Goblin Liaison Office was filled with spies and followers, tightening down on the regulation and rights for Goblins without any explanation why.

(Why would his father want to blackmail *the goblins?* They protected the wealth and vaults of the elite houses, what did Gringotts have to do with anything?)

Department of Magical Transportation on the sixth floor; the construction of portkeys and floo network under watch and being recorded for patterns. The apparition test center, the record of every apparate licenced witch or wizard was now public information for them.

The Department of International Magical Cooperation was apparently the most difficult to sink into, the fifth floor unreachable until recently. Adrian had distracted Dumbledore, distracted Mad-Eye Moody and distracted the minister himself (who had seemingly been debating and arguing with detaining Adrian. 'The child of Bellatrix Lestrange is too dangerous to walk away, a child who is possibly linked to multiple deaths at a wizarding school *must* be interrogated, Albus!')

Adrian had been isolated alone without care, because his mistakes were a proper *distraction.* His father didn't check in, because Adrian had been doing a wonderful job already wasting everyone's time.

Barty Crouch Sr. died of suspicious means, murdered apparently in an excessively violent manner. Gore everywhere, blood and body parts flung around the room it was a marvel that Barty's head was found in tact. The paper's didn't report it, they were printing propaganda in large font and black ink stains.

Spies were in place, Imperius curse functioning perfectly and without the world ever knowing, Magical Britain's policy for the trade standards and the cooperation with other magical governments was run by *Lord Voldemort.*

Basilisks couldn't vomit out of horror, it didn't quell Adrian's desire to do so anyways.

Adrian returned as Cerestes. Draped in black, standing motionless on the balcony over the throne room. A statue, watching above without contributing.

Nobody asked questions, although he saw the eyes drift upwards from under the masks.

(Was this his purpose? To serve the monster that tore him apart until he was nothing *and always would be?*)

They said the Cruciatus Curse changed you, twisted you on a scale so great you never recovered. It didn't pain you, it destroyed you.

Adrian had a father once; Adrian watched him die and killed the woman who struck him down.

This monster on his throne, he may biologically be his sire but he was no father for Adrian. He didn't deserve the title, he didn't deserve the *obedience.*

An eye for an eye. To gain Adrian's loyalty, Adrian had to gain his.

What monster would tear apart his child until nothing was left? What beast in this chaotic world *dare* assume that title after such atrocities?

Adrian's eyes narrowed from under his hood, staring at his father with a rising level of disgust.

Adrian inhaled in surprise as something twitched for lack of better words, in his head. Adrian reached out slowly, grasping the iron railing with both hands as he stared down at the mass of black and white masks.

It was unmistakable, something was twitching in his head. Moving in a way nostalgic of...*something.*

It moved, disrupting his thoughts like a thrashing carp on the water's surface. Something was in his brain, moving slightly and tentatively.

Adrian sunk away, investigating out of curiosity. He found it, void of detail and thrashing sloppily. Attempting to move without gaining ground.

It stopped suddenly, almost *aware* of Adrian's knowledge. He watched it, finding it familiar in all ways he knew.

Master?

It sunk away, broken, and the high nasally pitch of Lord Voldemort sent Adrian biting his tongue.

Somehow, *somehow,* Lutain was in Adrian's mind.

The Department of Mysteries was located on the ninth level in the Ministry of Magic. Disguised and hidden with various traps and wards to keep out those without clearance.

It investigated the strangest wonders of the world, the concepts and truths that had not yet been discovered (and likely never would.)

A selection of well trained unspeakables, silent over their work and what dwelled in the depths. Sworn to the Ministry, except those of course, who had thrown away their lives and now humbly kneeled to what they considered a god.

Broderick Bode was under the Imperius Curse, cast by Lucius Malfoy. Augustus Rookwood is a Death Eater himself, grinning savagely as he spilled the secrets that nobody had ever known.

The Department studied things impossible; death, time, space, thought, and love. They held the halls of prophecies, marveling over thoughts far too complex to ever understand.

Adrian wondered, if the Department of Mysteries invented the Cruciatus Curse itself.

Lutain pressed into Adrian's head again, somehow pushing through the rain puddle like a fish stuck on a hook.

It was fascinating to watch, to sense the squirming and observe from a distance. Interesting in the same way it was interesting to watch a rabbit squirm in the clutches of a hawk.

Somehow, the fact that Lutain was (*impossibly)* connecting with Adrian was reassuring. Calming in the way everything wasn't. Maybe *this* was what a familiar was, the ability to understand and to connect without words spoken.

Nagini didn't visit him that night, he imagined that she was guilty of what he had turned into.

Adrian stood silently, shrouded in black with his head bowed. He knew it was unsettling, he knew that *he* was unsettling.

The man sitting across from his father, nearly sweating through the clothing he wore, was ministry at minimum. Voldemort sat in his high clawed chair, hands folded calmly in his lap as the stranger

mumbled and fumbled with his leather bag. He pulled scrolls and documents out by the dozen, scrambling to align them properly in the well lit room.

His father said nothing, watching with crimson eyes.

"S-so, we have these in transit to Bulgaria-" The man gulped out, pointing at something on the parchment. Adrian couldn't see much of it, but from what he *could,* it looked like official documentation of some sort.

"I presume you've contacted the houses in France." Adrian's father spoke, voice flat and cold. A question phrased as a statement.

"Y-yes my lord." The man humbly nodded, nearly shaking where he sat, "The German corporations have agreed to retain goods instead of exporting them."

Voldemort shifted, folding his hands in one another, knuckles curled together carefully. "And the other countries?"

The man gulped, a thin sheen of sweat spreading over his brow. "The United States are struggling to come back since we've increased taxation rates- thankfully out of public eye. They've reduced importation rates by 7%. China isn't as cooperative, but I'm confident our terrorist group will divert enough attention for us to slip legislature under them. The French shell vaults are working with the Netherlands and Norway."

Adrian wasn't understanding what was happening. He hadn't...he hadn't ever thought of his Father's influence to extend out of Magical Britain. He hadn't ever expected to somehow...to somehow be a pawn in a *global* playing field.

Germany was retaining goods instead of selling them? Germany wouldn't get money then, they would have a surplus.

And Magical Britain would have a *shortage.*

His father had damaged the importation rate of goods leaving the country- that was why it was so pivotal to infiltrate the Ministry of Magic. He was creating hidden legislation, illegally passing laws to increase the scarcity and surplus of things commonly exported.

Wouldn't that reduce the price of things they exported- what *did* the UK export? Adrian couldn't remember the precise details- wasn't the Magical UK the main supplier for potion distillation? Fuels? Transportative processes like floo powder?

What did they *import?*

"How are the Goblins reacting?"

The man gulped, shuffling through his papers for something else. "They've filed lawsuits against the legislation set in place. The suits have been frozen thankfully, our allies in the courts have truly been remarkable. So far, their profits are dwindling and they're nearly removed from other economic ventures other than the vaults and banks."

Voldemort smirked, the smallest cruelest grin. It made the stranger flinch.

"Excellent to hear." Voldemort continued calmly, "the papers are continuing to print our work?"

The man nodded feverently. "Yes, my lord. They're continuing with the increased focal on Skylar

Potter….Although I- forgive me, but I don't understand *why* we are focusing on the child."

Voldemort blinked slowly, like a predatory animal. "You question my work?"

Adrian looked away, still deep in thought. He didn't need to look at the man to know he was being tortured, he could hear the screams just fine.

"I don't expect you to understand what is occurring." His father spoke, hissing low without looking over towards Adrian. Adrian swallowed heavily, and didn't respond from where he stood in the corner.

"Your part will be approaching soon." His father continued bluntly. *"I expect you to not fail me."*

Adrian nodded, pausing before hoarsely hissing out a quiet, *"yes father."*

Voldemort's hand twitched slightly, other than that he didn't move. *"You are different. Regardless of your weakness, should you fail me I will not be happy."*

Adrian almost smiled, wry and dry. His father hadn't asked, his father likely didn't know.

(He likely didn't care, that Adrian was dying.)

"I won't fail." Adrian croaked back. In heart, he knew he would likely fail.

"Good. It is time to show that old fool that he was wrong all along. Isn't that right, Harry Potter?"

"I want to make a deal with you." Skylar spoke, whispering quietly into the dark. Eyes wide, glazed without thought as he stared into the dark

Lutain sat across from him, his jaw open wide and eyes glazed in cue. A pause, a second before the low hissing mist of Lutain's ability responded. A memory in the making, voices unheard and being heard all at once. Skylar's head pounded, his heart beating as if he was running a marathon.

A second later, a whisper echoed back in a clearly amused and curious voice. Tinted wrongly, heard underwater or from ears unlike Skylar's own.

"I haven't made a deal in a long time."

Adrian smiled ironically in the dark. Drifting through the foggy haze of inside his mind, he watched the lethargic splashing of what he considered his other half.

"The last time we tried to make deals, Lutain, well...I'm sure you remember how that ended."

"Lutain is a translator, he...he's the messenger."

It was distorted, choppy and weak as if through a floo call. Broken, unmistakable.

Adrian's smile slipped away instantly. He nearly recoiled, chillingly unsure of how to proceed. "I- *Skylar?"*

"I have a deal."

Skylar had no hesitations, no regret. His morals had gotten in the way before, this was *war.* Not

everyone could be saved anymore.

Not everyone could live. People would die, that was a fact of life. Some people were more at risk than others, some people were destined to die.

"There's a few objects I need, that belong to your father." Skylar began, fumbling over the words only slightly. Somewhere miles away, a headache pounded in heavy unrelenting pulses. "Things he cherishes. A locket, a cup, something of Ravenclaw, possibly something of Gryffindor."

"*He cherishes little, Boy Wonder. He values power."*

"They're secret." Skylar fumbled over his tongue, "si- *four* objects of great importance to him."

Assuming that Adrian was close with the giant snake, Nagini, it was better not to mention that at all. The snake, Voldemort himself, and the ring shouldn't be talked about. The four objects, belonging to the founders were all fair game.

"Why do you need these things? Ransom? Are they artifacts?"

Adrian couldn't know about the Horcruxes, it wouldn't do for the boy to realize what could possibly happen to his own familiar.

"I need you to destroy them- as a Basilisk."

Adrian's breath hitched in surprise, confusion swirling like a fleury of snow through his mind.

Four objects of great importance? Adrian could only presume that they would be powerful, his father only valued power. It wouldn't be something rare or expensive, it would be something with strength or abilities far beyond normal.

The only thing Adrian instantly thought of, was the diary he had found when he was twelve. He had returned it to his father, apparently it was somehow destroyed- did Skylar only need three objects then?

And why did Skylar need him to destroy them *as a Basilisk?*

"What are you looking for?" Adrian asked, a low murmur under his breath as his thoughts swirled around him.

"A locket. Belonging to Salazar Slytherin. A Goblet belonging to Helga Hufflepuff. An unknown artifact belonging to Rowena Ravenclaw or Godric Gryffindor."

Adrian knew the locket.

He always thought there was something powerful about it, inexplicably so.

(He knew where it was, hidden away out of sight. Nagini had taken it, bemoaned the journey she made to a hidden cave miles away.)

A goblet- that wasn't something Adrian knew about. Between the last two founders, Ravenclaw was the more likely founder to have an object worshiped. Adrian couldn't possibly think of what.

Skylar must truly be desperate, to contact Adrian.

(How was he doing this, anyways?)

"I know of the locket." Adrian spoke back, voice clipped in return. "You're asking me to betray my father."

"I'm asking you for a deal, not as the Boy Who Lived to Cerestes', but as Skylar to Adrian."

Under the table. Skylar was operating without anyone else's knowledge, working on his own.

How...interesting.

"You're talking as if I'm going to agree to this...impending disaster." Adrian's lip curled twisted. "What could you, Skylar Potter, *possibly* have that I want?"

Adrian sunk, seeping through the rippling water with a deep exhale of his mind and body.

Tinted, distorted, seeing clumsily through Lutain's eyes as if they were his own.

Skylar Potter, looking as genuine and as infuriating as the day they had last seen each other.

"If you help me get the objects and destroy them, once this is over I'll give you what you want more than anything."

Lutain and Adrian tilted their head, speaking as one in a broken croon and gurgle, "it must be good if you're so confident to contact me. After all, you *killed* Remus."

What could Skylar Potter offer him, to rectify his own failure?

Skylar whispered, like a breeze. *"Once this is over, you'll kill me in any gruesome way you can imagine, and I'll welcome it like a brother."*

Masterlist for Antithesis Artwork

Link to the Discord!

Withdraw

Chapter Summary

Where the house of cards finally collapse to the ground

Chapter Notes

Here's the end of Part 3! I'll be on a couple week hiatus on vacation, link at the bottom is to the fanart and to the discord!

'Love me love me love me love me lovemelove m.e'

It was a beautiful sunny day when the Magical world panicked, and the economy collapsed.

It was unexplained, brief and simple. No foul play- the ancient Pureblood houses simply...*withdrew their vaults.*

This alone wouldn't be a problem; the finances of Purebloods were of no concern to others. What was a concern, was the legislation set in place to deter Goblin galleon fraud, stating that if at any point *'A Goblin operated institution experiences a dip in financial inventory by greater than 40% the closing of such institution is imminent and final until such store may be rectified.'*

Purebloods withdrew and canceled vaults, which together compiled 49% of all individual vaults within the depths of Gringotts. Due to the legal ramifications, panic hit, interest rates froze, the entire market *crashed.*

Similarly, the world drew attention to the previously unknown shortage in global imports, and the failure to sell general exports. A surplus of useless distilled potion ingredients, a shortage of food. Chaos unfolded, people panicked, a store near Cardiff was robbed and set on fire.

The Minister fumbled, scrambling in the spotlight as he struggled to explain things he knew nothing about. Fudge, the idiot, graciously leapt at the single opportunity a planted reporter threw at him.

"Yes yes- I, I will *certainly* be meeting with our saviors!" Fudge laughed uncomfortable, looking close to running out. "I- an exclusive meeting! Yes yes, Albus Dumbledore and Skylar Potter here! Tonight!"

Adrian flinched away after seeing the paper, slowly lifting his head to look at his father who in his normal skin, looked very close to gloating.

"The man is so lost," Voldemort sighed, tracing one human finger across Fudge's printed face. "It would be a mercy to kill him. I *am* curious to see how he spins this, especially with the murder of the late Undersecretary."

A pause, a single red eye looking at him from across the table. "You impressed me with that one."

Adrian didn't speak.

Voldemort sighed, a large sound as he took a seat. Tilting his face with narrowed eyes. He was a handsome man. Adrian would have been also.

"I don't have much to say anymore." Adrian said back, calmly and flat.

Voldemort smiled, a sharp lipped movement which set his teeth gleaming. "Ah, I see the world has finally ruined that...youthful innocence of yours."

Adrian's hand twitched, flexing harshly and causing his father to laugh sharply. Amused by Adrian's aggressiveness.

"I have questions, father."

Voldemort tilted his head, dark hair perfectly groomed. A pause, then a furrow between Voldemort's brows as he leant forward partially. "Your eyes have changed."

Adrian didn't break eye contact, but he didn't feel the pressure of legilimency in his mind. "It happened a while ago."

Voldemort looked interested, a spark in his eyes. Fascination over something he didn't know. "How...interesting. Of all traits to carry from your animagus form."

It's not because of that. Adrian chewed his tongue sharply. *It's because I have a parasite that apparently is eating my soul.*

Voldemort waved one hand leisurely, looking as relaxed as any other. "You have questions."

Adrian licked his lower lip and nodded ever so slightly, lowering his eyes out of respect. "I do not understand the...the goblin legislation."

Voldemort to his credit, didn't sigh. Instead, he tapped one finger on his chin as if thinking. "Ah, you were there when I monitored our movements. Yes, a rather...*finicky* plan on my side, perhaps. Difficult to follow."

Adrian didn't move, and his father sighed as if annoyed he never got a rise.

"Since the Goblin Rebellions, Gringotts Wizarding Bank has run the economic stability of our country." Voldemort picked at his nails, clawing out grime from under the white edge. "Of course, the general racism of society has...inhibited, the true control of our finances to goblins. Goblins are represented by the Goblin Liaison Office in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. Of course, since the department interaction is near impossible due to the *unnecessarily complex* system of department communication, Goblins are generally unaware of all proceedings from other departments. The Department of International Magical Cooperation is not required to inform the Goblin Liaison Office when new standards for trade are set in place, which allowed us to trigger an economic stagnation."

"What purpose does that serve?" Adrian asked unsurely, feeling far too unaware to truly contribute to the conversation. "Ruining the economy?"

Voldemort stared at him, evaluating him. "We are not inflating the standard for currency, merely the price for produce and other perishables. I have plans set to subtly damage public services such

as floo networks, public areas, other government held operations. Legislation will be signed at any time now in a guise to assist the impending collapse of the goblin economy. This will allow the Ministry to borrow money for public relief programs, further deteriorating the goblin influence on our effort."

Adrian finally caught a grip on the information, filtering through it the best he could. "The taxation rates would-"

"Increase." Voldemort confirmed with a slow blink and the smallest tilt of a smirk. "A stressed population which pressures the incompetent Ministry, and eats propaganda praising Albus Dumbledore and Skylar Potter?"

Adrian felt equal parts amazed, and horrified. "The population will rebel."

"And our puppet is placed in Fudge's steed." Voldemort nodded without care, "we'll reduce the importation and exportation redirection, reduce the taxation rate, and shift the public image into discrediting Albus Dumbledore and his work. Once we have suitably eradicated the former establishment, we will gain control of the Ministry first hand and repurpose this nation."

The war was never about fighting and battle. It had been a distraction- *Adrian* had been a distraction. How many days had Moody watched him instead of sniffing out the rats in the ministry? How many days had Tonks cleaned the house for him instead of reporting to the aurors to hunt down the various leads?

"Today, Fudge will invite Albus Dumbledore and Skylar Potter into the Ministry, likely for his public image. We will retrieve the prophecy, and remove those hindrances once and for all."

Adrian nodded and lowered his eyes, staring at the table resolutely.

His father watched, then huffed quietly. "You were much more exciting when you were younger and naive."

"I grew up." Adrian murmured back. "I learned, that sometimes speaking gets you nowhere."

Voldemort tilted his head, looking at him inquisitively. "You surprise me. That was unexpectedly insightful."

Adrian paused, "I've been thinking."

Voldemort smiled in interest once more, "I will admit, I had always doubted your use. Bellatrix was adamant that you...would prove yourself, so to speak. Not how she intended of course, but perhaps there is something for you yet."

A while back, that would have crippled Adrian.

This Adrian, the one who had murdered Bellatrix and watched Remus die- this Adrian didn't care anymore.

"I hope so, father." Adrian said numbly.

I know what it is like, to be unmade.

I know what it is like, to be nothing.

And through that, I know I am not.

Adrian didn't know when it sunk in, when it soaked through his bones and into his marrow.

Skylar gave him a proposition, he had thought it ridiculous.

What could Adrian gain? What was he getting*?* The genuine promise that if Adrian had managed to screw up *that badly,* Skylar would finally let Adrian kill him? Would Skylar change his mind when he found out? Would everything change?

(Skylar- the others, they had no idea of everything. They had no idea of all the strings pulling and twisting. They had no idea of how...*imminent* it was.)

Objects of importance, for Skylar's life.

Adrian had to destroy the objects in his Animagus form, for Skylar's life.

(an eye for an eye, but nothing about this was fair.)

Adrian loved his father, in the warped unconditional way he could do nothing about. He loved Remus, he loved Luna. Perhaps it was destiny, that everyone he adored would always die?

Adrian had seen both sides, had been incorporated in the efforts of Dumbledore's side and Voldemort's side. Without question, Dumbledore's side was more naive and arrogant but undisputedly more ethically *good.* Voldemort...Adrian was afraid to live in a world where his father ran it, where he was in the background as an executioner for everything he stood for.

Perhaps it was a mercy, that he was dying. He wouldn't have to watch the world burn, when he himself was burning out.

For all the protections of the Ministry of Magic, they had no way to stop someone from using the floo network and simply...walking in.

The network was open to public, as most of the visitors were civilians seeking government aid or filling out necessary forms. The floo filtered thinly, detecting and monitoring only a few fireplaces that were strictly red marked. The loophole was simply- utilize a public floo and enter the building.

With Skylar Potter and Albus Dumbledore's public meeting later that day, the ministry was quite empty. The busy offices were cleared so less workers would be present for the meeting and public statements, there were perhaps dozens of wizards and witches in the center atrium compared to the usual hundreds. The stone was cold, dark and echoing as they walked over it. Adrian wore the hard soles on his boots, they clicked loudly and imposingly as he followed the silent steps of his father. They strode across the floor without care, his father in his natural skin. Adrian didn't like how similar they looked, unmistakably related when compared side to side.

Adrian was wearing his cloak, the Cerestes cloak disguised only subtly to give it the appearance of a normal cloak along the bottom. His true wand in his sleeve- he still had blood on his hands from the last time he used it.

They walked, Adrian felt like his stomach was going to drop out from under him.

His father, (*Voldemort,* in the *Ministry of Magic*) strode without pause over to the gated device and waited.

"*Name."* It prompted in a cheery mechanical voice.

"Tom Riddle." His father drawled, his lips quirking in a smirk to himself. "Visitor."

The machine chimed and popped out a sticker, bright font exactly what he had said. With a small grimace, his father peeled off the adhesive side and placed it just over his breast pocket. It looked so ridiculous, Adrian snorted out a hysterical giggle.

Voldemort sighed as if the entire thing was beneath him. "We're meeting Broderick Bode, then we will descend to level nine. Today the department has been cleared."

Adrian nodded and said nothing, the two of them walked towards the fountain. His father barely glanced at it, instead he scoured the multiple elevators as if searching each individual one.

A moment later one of the elevators opened, a stiff backed tall man walked out. Sallow-skinned, his face was twisted into a frown as if he was always sad. He was unsettling to look at, just as Adrian was.

"Hello." Broderick Bode spoke, monotone and flat as his eyes looked at both before behind them, "I will take you to the Department of Mysteries."

Voldemort didn't respond, he just started walking towards the elevators as if he were the one in control of the march. Adrian checked the massive clock hanging in the atrium- they had an hour before Dumbledore and Skylar would appear.

The elevator was jarring, nearly sending Adrian flying. He grasped the security ropes, clutching them tightly with a hiss between his teeth. His father glanced at him with minor amusement, as if nearly delighted with how Adrian had almost smashed his skull into the wall.

They descended, flipped and swirled on a chaotic path downwards before they broke through into a hollow. The door was massive, unsettling and cold. Adrian shivered, all three of them exited the lift.

The door opened under Broderick's hand, spinning multiple gears to shift out of place. The room then, was large and in the shape of a circle. Multiple doors spin around them like a clock, clicking into place without help with which room would move to which.

One door opened, and the spy Augustus Rookwood walked out with a small swagger. The man glanced at Broderick who stiffly left through another unmarked door.

"My Lord." Rookwood murmured, lowering to one knee in his Unspeakable's robe, "I-..." The man trailed off, seeing Adrian with the smallest flicker of surprise and confusion.

"Ignore him." Voldemort dismissed without care, "Rookwood. Take us to the Hall of Prophecy."

The man nodded, "of course, my Lord. This way, watch your step."

They entered a door on the furthest right, pausing to allow it to spin behind them. The walls were stacked with *thousands* of glowing spheres, filled with a white smoke similar to the patronus spell. It was eerily quiet, hushed with whispers impossible to hear.

"This way, although I must warn there are intense detection spells and protections in place." Rookwood warned, taking a winding path through the shelves. They were careful not to touch any of the orbs, Adrian's clicking boots echoed through the cavern.

Finally, they reached an unremarkable orb, different in the label on the shelf that held it. *Skylar/Harry Potter (?), Dark Lord Voldemort.*

Adrian wanted to flinch, he wanted to turn around and march out and ignore the solid *proof* that his life was a lie.

"You've done well, Rookwood." Voldemort murmured, looking at Adrian expectantly.

Adrian reached out with shaky hands, and placed his fingers on the cold glass. Rookwood inhaled sharply and shifted away slightly, as if to protect himself from an explosion.

Nothing happened, the mist inside swirled and Adrian swallowed thickly as he lowered it protectively towards his chest.

"Activate it." Voldemort murmured, looking at the orb in obvious hunger.

The prophecy warmed, and when Adrian repeated his father's words it shifted to a bright silver like a pensieve. The voice that came from it was unfamiliar to Adrian, raspy and hoarse in an ancient knowing way. "*The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies…"*

It trailed off, and Rookwood exhaled shakily. The prophecy to defeat the dark lord. The reason why Adrian was targeted. The reason his entire life had turned to *this.*

"Obliviate." Voldemort sharply spoke, flickering his wand to leave Rookwood frozen, jaw dropping and his eyes blank and foggy. "Adrian. Follow me."

Adrian was helpless to argue. They walked through the shelves, silent and imposing. It felt like a graveyard, like a forest after a wildfire had struck. The elevator was just as empty. The way back up was much longer than the way going down.

"Tempus." Voldemort murmured, glancing at the conjured clock briefly before he smoothed his robe and fixed his hair. He looked perfect, he looked more a minister of magic than *the* Minister of Magic. He looked down at Adrian- still shorter but now reaching a respectable height. With the tip of his wand, he shifted Adrian's bangs to the side to stare at the lightning bolt scar on his upper forehead.

"I tried to kill you there," Voldemort murmured, tapping the scar with his wand gently, "I still do not know why it didn't work."

Adrian met his father's eyes, the man's expression was always a mystery to him.

The elevator stopped. The doors rattled as they slowly opened, and the atrium was in chaos.

A photoshoot was occurring in front of the fountain. Skylar Potter was obvious, dressed in neat tidy robed with Albus wearing sparkly blue and silver robes. The man looked tired, but relatively confident and good. One hand on Skylar's shoulder- the boy looked slightly overwhelmed with everything.

Something about...Skylar felt off, almost magnetic. Something gravitational that would have left Adrian walking towards the boy if not for the cold prophecy in his hands and his father's grasp on his shoulder.

A small flicker of recognition, and Adrian inhaled slightly. Skylar had Lutain on him, disguised somewhere under his clothing.

(That was impressive, Lutain hated hiding under clothing and not around a neck.)

"How wonderful this will be." Voldemort spoke softly, watching the mob of reporters and cameras with a smile exhilarated smile, "I can barely wait to see the old fool's face."

Adrian licked his lower lip anxiously, "No spells?"

Voldemort nearly snorted. "No spells, unless the coot attacks first. Defensive only. We are here to invalidate the man. Here marks the beginning of *my* ministry."

With nothing else to say, Voldemort started walking towards the masses.

Adrian followed, his clicking shoes drawing a few eyes. A half dozen people glanced over, watching him out of pity or disbelief over his scars. He should have been used to it by now.

Fudge was bumbling on, stumbling over words and trying to remedy the situation the best he could. The man was so incompetent it worried Adrian how the entire ministry could function at all.

They walked until they were close enough to hear the chaotically shouted questions. Adrian could spot the subtle flicks and movements of his father's hand, casting charms and wards without vocalizing them. Wordless magic Adrian could never hope to accomplish.

With a small pause, Voldemort rolled his head and snapped a few vertebrae. Adrian could hear the pop from where he stood next to him.

An inhale, and then an exhale.

"Albus Dumbledore," his father's voice echoed, not so loud it burst eardrums. It was a low bass rumble that was clearly heard, exasperated in a darkly amused and annoyed way. An amplifying charm executed the proper way, the stunning awestruck way. "Are you done falsely campaigning your lies?"

The crowd paused in surprise, before stumbling apart and turning the cameras behind to start flashing them at Adrian and his father. Adrian said nothing, holding still even as his head ached and his anxiety fluttered like a desperate butterfly.

Skylar Potter snapped his head around, locking eyes with Adrian and then the unfamiliar man standing next to him. Dumbledore instantly reacted, taking one step forward and using one hand to hold Skylar behind him. The other held his wand, pointed at Voldemort with steady hands.

"Tom." Dumbledore greeted calmly, a small dread filled look in his eye. "I fear it's been a while. How have you been? You look positively radiant."

Voldemort responded instantaneously quick. "I fear you've been spreading lies of my appearance. A monster- truly? How offensive."

Fudge fumbled, trying to say something only for Skylar to shush him.

"Well." Dumbledore started, looking very on guard, "I hadn't expected to see you so soon. A Dark Lord doesn't suit you, Tom."

The murmurs and whispers started up, until *someone* seemed to get the clue and then the people were throwing themselves out of the way. A large clearing as they stuck to the walls.

"I'm here because I am tired of the lies you have spread." Voldemort drawled, taking one step

forward to dismissively swish one hand through the air, "the propaganda, the...*faith,* in your so-called *Wizarding Hero."*

Skylar gulped so visibly, his throat moved.

"Tom, leave young Skylar out of this quarrel." Dumbledore soothed, taking one step forward. "He is of no concern to you."

Voldemort smiled, the expression sharp. "Perhaps you're right. Fudge," Voldemort sighed, shifting his expression to look at the Minister (who was terrified beyond words.) "Your ministry is incompetent. Your regulations are foolish, your economy has collapsed, you have built your political strength on the word of a *false hero."*

Fudge floundered, face pale and hands shaking beyond words. Voldemort clicked his tongue disappointedly, looking back at Dumbledore. "All of this faith, in poor poor Skylar Potter."

Skylar stepped forward like the rash impulsive Gryffindor he was. "We'll stop you!"

Voldemort looked at the boy unimpressed, "Skylar Potter. I expected better."

Skylar fumed, and looked scared at the right time.

Adrian flinched slightly as the grip on his shoulder tightened slightly. Adrian inhaled silently, and took a step forward to direct public attention to him.

He didn't want this.

"Did you *truly* think, that you were something special?" Voldemort asked Skylar, tilting his head to the side slightly. "If you were something remarkable, I would have addressed that years ago."

"Tom…" Dumbledore warned, his wand still at the ready.

Voldemort ignored that, not looking away from Skylar even as the reporters began whispering along the walls. "Skylar Potter, did you *truly* think, that you were somehow something superior? That you had some...*ability,* that would change the world?"

Skylar looked pale and shaky. Adrian knew, that Skylar had thought those ideas.

"I'm the Boy-Who-Lived!" Skylar shouted back, sounding choked and close to crying.

Voldemort *laughed,* a cruel sharp noise that sent the hair on Adrian's arms standing upright.

"No," Voldemort *grinned,* "no, you *aren't."*

Dumbledore flinched in surprise, eyebrows rising in an obvious question and well hid confusion.

Voldemort beckoned behind him, and Adrian took a few stumbling steps forward.

Dumbledore's brows furrowed, and he inhaled so shakily at the sight of the prophecy in Adrian's hands he aged a decade in a second.

"Adrian." Skylar breathed in surprise, flickering between Adrian and Voldemort. Adrian could see the second it really clicked, the moment where the resemblance was finally set into place through the shape of their noses and the arch of their brow.

Dumbledore seemed to clue in quicker, and the man gasped and looked so stunned he fell to a

knee.

"Sir!" Skylar gasped, grabbing his arm to help hold him up. Dumbledore didn't look away from Adrian for a second.

"Tell them." Voldemort hissed, grinning with a sadistic smile so wide it could have split his face.

"I- I was born on July 31st," Adrian swallowed, his throat thick and voice slightly strangled. "I... My birth name is Harry James Potter."

Skylar collapsed to his knees. Eyes wide, Dumbledore closed his eyes as if already resigned. Voldemort's smile spread wider.

The whispers began, Adrian's hands were shaking.

"I'm the real Boy-Who-Lived." Adrian spoke, not hearing himself speak. "Dumbledore has said nothing but lies, and slander. Skylar Potter is not the savior of the wizarding world, and he never was."'

The cameras began flashing, looking only at Adrian and the glowing orb that he held.

Adrian inhaled shakily, and exhaled.

"The prophecy is a lie." Adrian spoke, the words tasting sour. "Everything Dumbledore has said, is a lie."

Adrian let go, and the orb smashed on the ground in an explosion of shards and white smoke. It whispered, vanishing into the air.

Dumbledore sighed in defeat. Skylar was shaking, as if he had seen a ghost. In shock, too overwhelmed to speak or even think.

Dumbledore was discredited, the public opinion broken now and distrusting the only sense of hope they had. The economy was broken, the ministry was incompetent. Because of Adrian, an entire revolution would likely take place in the matter of a week.

"Harry." Skylar whispered, unheard in the commotion and chaos of everything unfolding. The reporters turned, shouting and screaming at Fudge and Dumbledore demanding answers. Voldemort stood amid the chaos, the public now turned against those who had just favored him.

Do you know what it is like, to be unmade?

Adrian closed his eyes. Luna would have cried.

"Why didn't you tell me!" Skylar *screamed,* head pounding either from the soreness of crying, or the chaotic whirl of his thoughts.

They were hidden in one of the cottages, unmarked by the Potter wealth except for Gringotts. Dumbledore didn't think that the goblins had fallen- how had *everything fallen?*

"Sky-"

"*No!"* Skylar screamed, slashing weakly with one hand as his nose drooled snot. "I- *you told me* he was *dead!"*

"We thought he was!" Lily shouted back, her voice a hoarse whisper with how hard she was shaking. "He- my sister-"

"W-what?" Skylar's head spun as he scrambled to think, Lutain tightening around him to secure him to reality. "The- you mean the *Dursleys?* Dad said they were *terrible!"*

James hung his head, saying nothing.

"He-" Skylar's vision tinted red. "You- you *left him with anti-magics?"*

"Skylar." James started, quiet and sad as if he had no fight left within him, "nobody would have looked for him-"

"But someone *did!"* Skylar screamed, tears making his face sticky. "Someone went in and bloody *slaughtered them!* They *took my brother,* and brainwashed him into into-"

Lily crumpled to the ground, legs folding awkwardly around her as she held her face in her hands.

Good. Skylar thought vindictively. *They deserve that.*

Lutain hissed, twisting around to stare at Skylar the best he could from his vantage point. The tongue tasted air, the scales pressing against his skin. *Orphanage.*

It clicked, pieces of thoughts and ideas that Skylar knew as truth without questioning. A cruel matron, a cold blank building with crumbling walls. A garden snake, hanging in the meaty fist of an abusive child.

Skylar floundered for a few second, barely able to make words from his thoughts. "He- those bastards *abandoned him at an orphanage?"*

"What?" James asked in alarm, snapping his head up. "I- I didn't know-"

How could his dad not know *about the location of his brother?*

Skylar felt his chest heave. Lutain tucked closer, warm beyond the realm of reality. Something fueled him, caressing and coaxing the rage over the entire situation higher and stronger like a monster hatching.

His parents didn't know where his brother had been. They didn't know he was...given up. They had presumed that he had died in the cluster of blood and gore they all never spoke about. The elephant in the room, the nearly unrecognizable corpses of his aunt, uncle, cousin, and brother.

They had...they hadn't *known.*

Skylar reached a crescendo, he ducked his head into his hands and *screamed.*

(The floorboard nearest him blackened ever so slightly, and wafted a thin plume of dark grey smoke.)

End of Part 3

Link to the fanart

Link to the discord

Cyclic

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian feels alone, is dangerous, and Severus is a petty man.

Chapter Notes

Here starts part 4!
Also, the independent powerful Adrian arc!

'I'm so hungry so hhungry.'

Adrian was almost ashamed of how cyclic his thoughts had become. An unending cycle of paranoia, twisting his desires and emotions with flashes of pain and anxiety.

Never before had he doubted the eyes of the manor's paintings, never had he questioned the carpet for unseen rules recording his voice. Even parseltongue was no longer safe, Nagini and the statues ears for his mumblings.

Never had the house felt so...*hostile,* twisted and guarded in a way that felt wrong. He felt that despite being so high in the hierarchy (is that what this was?) he was so low in everything important. He felt like a spy, someone rogue with nobody to return to, nobody awaiting him in turn.

Did his father know that? Was that why he had let Adrian roam around the house aimlessly, silent and wandering with no destination in mind?

(Did his father know what it was like? To be unmade into something shapeless and broken?)

Was he supposed to be a replacement for Bellatrix? Was that the intent behind it all, baptized and purified in a puddle of snot and vomit; reborn in death like a perverse phoenix.

He knew what it was like to suffer, to be assured of life and reassured with every breath. The fact he felt through sensation was promise enough.

He had his wand, foreign and wrong where it pressed against his skin. Snug on his forearm, resting in the notch of his ulna and radius. Warmed with his blood, pressed against his pulse point.

Cyclic thoughts, alternating unsteadily between exasperation and exhausting. Questioning reality while reassuring himself that this *was* real.

(Do you know what it is like to be unmade?)

Were the birds he conjured real? Did they feel pain- did they suffer when he conjured them again and again and popped them like pimples. Pus and entrails thrown about the carpet as if leftover tinsel; banished without a second glance.

(When he died, would he too, be banished? Worth a cleaning spell and a *"oh what a shame,"* as his brain was cleaned from the nearest tapestry?)

There was a sense of...*power,* with death. The knowledge that your consequences for actions couldn't be worse than what fate had already determined. He was going to die, to be unmade by the thick black poison that nestled in his bones.

He was going to die- why not go out blazing with a fire, that for the first time ever, sparked from his own amusement.

Adrian was sick of playing for a side. There were none, not anymore.

Skylar had made him a deal, it was only *proper* that he...*hold his side* of the bargain.

Skylar Potter wanted objects relating to the founders, and the mysterious journal. If what Skylar Potter wanted was...*important,* then inquiring would only be catastrophic. The best course of action was to work around it, to find a loophole in the system that would keep his father unsuspecting. To be docile, calm and quiet.

From what he had gathered from the diary, the objects must be immensely powerful. Skylar didn't say to destroy them once he got them, instead he wanted them gathered and delivered. That implied that they had some sort of protective warding, a failsafe that alerted his father to their movement or removal. It wasn't impossible to assume his father could sense their presence then, which meant they would have to be stored outside the property. Hidden close enough for Adrian to access without apparation (it was trackable now with the control of the ministry), but far enough it wouldn't be detected from local scanning.

The objects themselves would be difficult to get. The locket he knew of, only from Nagini's complaining about how far she had to go to hide it. The diary he hadn't seen in *years,* he thought it was destroyed.

The other objects of Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff were completely different, he could only assume where they would be hidden. His father seemed especially pleased with the temporary closing of Gringotts- would it be unrealistic to assume something was hidden in the vaults? They would be even harder to access now, with the difficulty in removing any objects. His father had spoken highly of Bellatrix, screeching praise between the- *oh god oh*- torture. He spoke of her as if her death had pained him, but Adrian had seen his father's face. The man cared for nobody.

(Why was he so desperate with her death? Why would he be so...*worried?*)

Her vault then, the Lestrange vault was a likely place to look. Impenetrable, feeding on Bellatrix's unhealthy devotion; it would anchor her for life to serve her lord so humbly.

The locket had to be taken first, removed from where Nagini hid it and taken somewhere else. Then he'd have to ask about the diary- it would be all too obvious what he was after if he tackled the vault first.

Then, he'd have to find a way to get the objects to Skylar; not floo or portkey. Apparation was *impossible,* the only thing foolproof now was physically crossing the distance with non-magical means. On a broom, a bus, a bloody dragon for all he knew.

"Shite." Adrian cursed quietly, the sound loud as it traveled through the empty manor. Echoing off stone, swallowed by the rugs. Adrian missed Lutain.

Was Adrian even allowed to leave the property? Was he *allowed?*

Nagini was as loyal to his father as-.

Adrian twitched, and forced himself to not think about Lutain.

The best thing he could do was to venture out with Nagini, surely his father wouldn't be suspicious if he borrowed his familiar. Nagini could report back even, say if Adrian asked suspicious at all.

It was a shame legilimency didn't work on snakes.

Nagini was *fast,* the thick muscles under her scales were for a purpose other than strangulation. She parted grass and flowers easily, her streamline nose forcing between stems and over roots without pause. Adrian could marvel that, the path she made was plenty wide enough for him to follow.

He was fast, but his body was darker. It wasn't as hot as summer used to be, but the air was still stifling and sharp to breathe. The broken stalks of grass poked him sharply, not painful but unsettling against his scales. No wonder Nagini spent her time basking on a heated rock in the humid bathroom.

The double vision was something alarming, the way his senses flared and imprinted an echo of what he saw. Heat spitting him knowledge that permeated trees and physical objects, maps where the sun shone hottest or the trails where shrews visited regularly.

Nagini didn't stop, she only got faster once reaching the shade of the trees. They towered far above, branches and leaves so high they looked like abstract interpretations of clouds.

"Do you go this far always?" Adrian asked, voice garbled and lisping. His tongue felt foreign, quick and eager. Nagini didn't acknowledge his impediment, instead she changed course towards a pine.

"Sometimes," she hissed back passively. He could tell she was enjoying herself, enjoying how fast she was in comparison without really trying.

A bird chirped above, sounding off key and unsettling. The ears of a snake distorted the world itself, turning something so beautiful into a freakish sound.

"It's a long way," Adrian commented carefully, restraining the strained note he felt in his throat, *"I'm surprised you leave the house."*

Nagini glanced at him, her slit eyes impossible to read. *"I used to hunt with Lutain. I miss him."*

Adrian exhaled hurriedly, the small puff audible in a strange sound. *"I do too."*

Nagini stared a moment longer, before she continued.

She obviously wasn't as pleased with Adrian as she used to be. Lutain said that he smelled sick, that he smelled rotten and sour. Perhaps Nagini noticed also, perhaps her own instincts screamed to stay away from the diseased beast but her own master forced her to stay at his side.

"I've never gone this far," Adrian offered, recoiling sharply at the double vision he received at flicking his tongue. *"Have you ever gotten lost?"*

"Never." Nagini boasted, a spark of her old personality shining through, *"Master says I am very*

special."

Adrian huffed and without thinking, self-deprecating hissed out, *"Yeah, he never thought that about me."*

Nagini swung her head around, craning her neck so sharply her scales wrinkled like fabric. Her tongue flicked air, curling up and down like a whale's tail.

"You think that?" She asked, a strain of curiosity bleeding through. *"That he does not cherish you?"*

Adrian's mouth tasted wrong. *"He treats me like a gemstone."*

Nagini's tail curled slightly, *"you are precious to him."*

She didn't deny the gemstone comment.

"Do you ever wish you were more?' Adrian asked, finding words much easier now that Nagini seemed more open to what he said. She was less closed off, moving only ahead of him a small amount instead of creating the trail for him to follow. *"More away from him?"*

"I will always obey Master," Nagini responded without hesitation. *"I leave him on important journeys when he asks."*

"Like that locket trip?" Adrian asked with forced casualness, *"how did you move it?"*

"*I ate it."* Nagini hummed out, barely pausing as if it was obvious.

She...*ate it.*

Oh god, how was Adrian going to *bring it back?*

Adrian flicked his tongue, a nervous reaction. The after image burned and he mentally cursed himself over it.

"You must be very strong." Adrian rushed out, appealing to the python's vanity the best he could. *"It is difficult to move after eating."*

Nagini puffed proudly, *"I moved very far. It was difficult, but I am very strong."*

Adrian forced his breathing to be calm. *"Was it across many dens?"*

Nagini spat something which could be considered a huff, or perhaps a balk. *"No! Many fields, to the edge of the forest and under a rock!"*

She put emphasis on the rock part, so Adrian made sure to give a sound of shock. She seemed content, more delighted at his surprise.

"Yes," Nagini hummed in delight, *"only rat-man could touch it. I heard you killed rat-man."*

Adrian breathed. *"I did."*

"Did you eat him?"

"No, but he begged for his life a lot."

Nagini huffed before she turned, finding the trail they ventured out on to return with, *"pity. Should have ate him."*

Adrian turned to follow her back towards the house, mentally scrambling to remember the layout of the surrounding forest. *"He would have made me sick."*

"Hah!" Nagini hissed in amusement, *"you should come with me more. You're fun."*

Adrian tried not to show how sick he felt.

He did know the forest edge that Nagini mentioned, and he knew the cliff edge where the ground split like the maws of a hound. Large boulders jutting like teeth towards the sky. Exposed slate in the layers of a cake, coated in water and moss and slippery to the touch. He didn't know if he would be able to sense the locket again, but as a serpent he would have to find the hole and wriggle his way down. Then, he would have to eat the locket.

For Merlin's sake, how did his jaw even *work?*

His room felt empty and cold, the impractical spiral staircase he once adored now looked daunting. He would have to climb it, clothed in robes that disgusted him and a hood which hid him from everyone.

He wished he could write, that he could scribble his thoughts on paper and try to organize the whirlwind of his brain. Maybe if he drew or wrote, the cycle would end. The questions could be addressed and solved.

(It was too much a risk to write them, not with so many prying eyes and a father who would likely kill him. Who would make him beg for death.)

Skylar wanted the diary, how was he going to somehow sneak *that* out? He couldn't imagine eating it, even a locked seemed impossible. He would…he would have to *walk out* with it. He would have to leave the manor with his father's full knowledge.

"Shite," Adrian gasped hoarsely, sitting on the corner of his bed to hold his face in his hands. His whole body was shaking slightly, causing the frame to squeak. "*Shite."*

His father would only let him leave the manor if he trusted him, if he viewed his independence as an asset. Adrian was jewelry, something pretty to look at and to own.

Shite, the wizarding world *knew who he was.*

If he ever showed his face in public, he'd be instantly known either as the betrayer of the wizarding world or their only hope. He would be *swarmed,* unprotected and at the mercy of others. He couldn't perform magic, or his life was at risk. His father didn't know that, his father would view any failure to protect himself as a *weakness.*

Adrian would have to portray himself as some sort of...as something *powerful,* like Nagini. Something that could fight and defend and *strike.*

If he *did* attack, then the parasite or Vitaedax would increase and he would die *quicker.*

"Shite," Adrian gasped out, gulping for air as his nails dug sharply into his hairline.

What did his father view as power? Raw strength like what Bella had? The political influence like Draco's father? The lethal potential that Nagini possessed?

Adrian didn't have *any* of that- well, he had the power but he couldn't very well *use* it. He wasn't charismatic- his face made sure of that. He maybe was a political pawn but he knew next to bloody nothing about what was going on with the world. The lethal potential he had was his animagus form which was *thinner than a bedpost.*

Was there a way to...*imply* power? Show that it existed without actually showing his limits?

"Dammit." Adrian whispered, shoving the meat of his palm into his eyes and reveling in the squishing noise of his eyes being pressed, "shite, where's Luna when you need her?"

If anyone, *anyone*, could figure a way out of all of this, it would have been her.

"Do you know half of the school is afraid of you?" Luna asked him, her voice adopting the slightly melancholic tone that signaled to Adrian that she was being serious. The music of the Yule Ball was far away, the classroom quiet.

"It wouldn't surprise me."

"It's not because of how you look." Luna explained, as if it needed further explanation, "It's because of what you've done."

"I'm not sure how to tell you this, but that literally didn't help at all."

"It's because of the rumors, and your classes. Most of the rumors are true, though."

"If this is about Millicent-"

"You know, everyone in the school went to you if they needed something, even if it did cost them." Luna sighed wistfully, "Everyone knew that you could find out things they couldn't. Maybe you didn't know it then, but that's what it was. Adrian Selwyn, he knows how to curse you in four different ways, and how to heal you in five."

"Yeah well, you know how that business went up in flames."

"But you did that. I don't think anyone in Hogwarts' history made a bartering system for students. That's impressive."

"People aren't afraid of you because of Bellatrix Lestrange, they were afraid of you long before that." Luna conceded, "I heard that you don't struggle with spells."

"No, but that's because I practice."

"Adrian you're good at spells."

"I'm really not," he automatically blurted.

"Why are you arguing? Why do you think you're so...mediocre?"

"Because I am!" Adrian blurted.

Luna's spell faded out. She whispered it once more, squinting into his face as if looking for

something in particular.

"I don't think you are," She confided, "I think you're brilliant."

"Shite." Adrian breathed, rubbing the sleep from his eyes and the sticky remnants of tears during the night. "*Shite."*

Luna was right all along, too mature and too *aware* for her own good.

"Shite, i'm so sorry." Adrian mumbled into his hands, pausing before trying to compose himself the best he could. He had nearly forgotten about Yule. The snow, the lumos charms and the conjured birds in the rafters. He taught her how to do the spell better, she kept her wrist too limp to flick her wand.

He chuckled brokenly, trying not to think too much about those godforsaken herb bundle earrings, which made her smell like Snape's private stores. He tried not to think about the *terrible* dress she wore- the one she confessed a week later had given her a rash from chafing. He tried not to remember the way her eyes glowed and her hair looked in the unicorn horn tiara she made.

"Okay," Adrian breathed to himself, his voice distorted and snotty and broken even in his ears, "Okay, you were right, Luna."

He paused, making a low groan before he rolled his head, snapping the bones in his neck. His hands fisted in his blanket, curling so tightly his knuckles creaked. He steadied his breathing, let it out slowly in the way Remus showed him.

Luna said he could learn spells faster than others, that it took him less time to learn them. She said he was dangerous in his knowledge, his *obscurity.*

"Looks like I have spells to learn." Adrian whispered to himself. He inhaled once more, held it in sorrow for the loss he was about to make- and let it go.

There was a time for him to accept his flaws, for him to recognize his shortcomings and know that it *didn't matter.* It didn't *matter* that he wasn't perfect, or that he couldn't reach the expectations placed upon him.

Luna was right, she was always right.

"I'm afraid you're going to do something stupid for the approval of someone that doesn't matter."

"Time to change that," Adrian breathed, mindful of the air around him, of all the eyes that would forever be watching him from now on. "Time to change *this.*"

If his father desired a weapon, then he would pretend to be just that, and in heart be what he always desired. A weapon, silent and obeying, and maybe through his actions he would be given freedom.

"Okay," Adrian breathed, rubbing his eyes and straightening his shoulders. He grabbed his cloak, pulling it over and fastening the ties. His father was busy, but Rowle wouldn't be.

He found Rowle in the training hall, demolition dummies without a glance. Adrian felt his anxiety grow as he watched- the man was an excellent dueler.

"Rowle." Adrian spoke, licking his lips from under his cloak, he waited until the larger man paused, turning to look at him without a care. One eyebrow lifted, his mouth twisting into an

amused smirk.

"Well, there you are." Rowle spoke, his voice low and as threatening as before. Adrian was thankful for the cloak, thankful that it shrouded his face.

"I heard you killed Bellatrix." Rowle paused, twisting his torso to address Adrian fully, "was it a cheap shot?"

Offensive, rude, just as Adrian remembered him.

"No," Adrian spoke, calming himself the best he could before he reached up and lowered the hood of his cloak. "It was fair."

Rowle exhaled quickly through his nose, scrutinizing Adrian with a small frown. "You look terrible."

Adrian's mouth twitched slightly, "what did you expect?"

Rowle rolled one shoulder, nodding his head back at the dummies, "you here for those? You've been a ghost around here, making the new recruits nearly shite themselves."

Adrian drew his wand quickly, grasping the wood tightly in his hand. "You taught me spells before. You gave me dark magic addiction."

Rowle shrugged without a care. "You were idiot enough to not ask questions. How young were you, twelve? Thirteen?" Rowle's eyes sparked dangerously, "you any smarter now?"

That was a bribe, a sharp taunt to Adrian's infamous temper.

He heard the words, recognized where he once may have been furious. What point was there to be angry, when it would accomplish nothing. What would it matter in two years, if Adrian would be dead by then?

"Obviously." Adrian stated back, bluntly and numb. He could see the moment Rowle heard it, the confused twitch of his cheek. Adrian lifted his wand to the side, unthreatening but very clear what he wanted. "What's the most obscure spell you know."

Rowle moved slowly, away from the targets and closer to Adrian himself. "Transmogrification curse."

Adrian had heard of it, loosely described as a killing torture curse. Pain so extreme it caused the heart to fail, death from torture. Uninteresting- (nothing *would ever* compare to Crucio)- and known. "I said *obscure,* Rowle."

"Corpotabeo." Rowle drawled, stressing the vowels until it sounded like another language, "old spell right there. Never got the hang of it."

Adrian hadn't heard of that one. "What's the wand movement."

Rowle stepped back, lowering himself in a mock bow, a small smirk on his face the entire while. Adrian could tell, just by Rowle's expression, that the spell was likely incredibly dark.

It couldn't be worse than what Adrian had already done, what he had seen.

Do you know what it is like to be unmade?

Adrian looked at the dummy, steadied his hand and pointed his wand. Rowle demonstrated the wand movement, sharp yet simple. Adrian mimicked it once, then stared at his target. The center dummy, with two on either flank.

"Corpotabeo."

The rush existed, stinging and painful along his arteries and veins in the way all dark magic was. It felt like bliss, in a strange muted way. Delightful but not the way it used to be. Not a high enough dosage for true, *pure* bliss.

The dummy crinkled, blackened, and dropped to the ground in festering slimy *rot.* It looked decomposed, melting away before his eyes in a grotesque display of ruined wet cloth and slime.

The dummies on its flank- melted away.

The dummies behind that- melted away.

The floor itself stank, floorboards peeling the stain and arching into a single circular area of *stink* and *illness.*

Twelve feet at the minimum, the dummy was nothing more than shapeless decay.

Adrian stared at the pile, rotating just enough to look at Rowle from the corner of his eye.

Rowle had taken steps back, stumbling over his feet desperately. His skin had turned waxy, visible sweat and trembling across his shoulders.

"You-" Rowle gaped, looking at Adrian as if he was a dementor, not a person, "You- you *did* it."

"And the dummies next to it," Adrian noted bluntly, "and the ones behind those. And the floor. Were you testing me, Rowle?"

The man looked at him with something impossible to describe, the grudging hatred of something going unexpectedly. The pain of frustration, the growing terror. "No, my lord."

Adrian felt his throat wet, metallic and coppery on his tongue. His nose was bleeding, subtle and cold down his throat like snot. He ignored it, instead looking down at Rowle without any expression. "Then I expect you to show me more spells. You'll find, that there aren't any I can't perform."

The spiral staircase and the impractical balcony over the throne room was just as cold and uninviting as ever.

Adrian stood, shrouded in black with the hood disguising his face. His father below him, lounged on his throne build on blood and bone with Nagini around his heels like a reminder.

Adrian couldn't see his father from the angle where he stood, only the sea of black and white masks which filled the large room. Packed like sardines in a tin can, an amalgamate of bodies and nameless faces that meant nothing and everything to Adrian at once. What purpose did he serve, looking out over a sea of people without ever having a role? A poster child for what went wrong, a reminder for everyone who bound themselves to eventual death, that even the strongest figure of hope was a lie.

Adrian knew what hell was, he knew the agony of realization and *knowing* that his entire life was

built on false promises. He was nothing special in his father's eyes, he was everything special in everyone else's.

He once had Lutain, and he had lost him.

He once had Luna, and he had killed her.

Below, his father was talking in the hissing voice that disturbed everyone. The voice that over pronounces his 's' until it verged on parseltongue. Nagini was quiet, content or perturbed by it all.

"Snape," his father spoke, and from the masses a single body moved and the crowd parted like a biblical painting. He walked forward, moving without pause or hesitation.

Adrian knew with certainty stronger than the knowledge of his own name, that Snape was going to die.

"How convenient." his father began calmly and amused, "that you have failed me once more."

Snape always failed them, he had failed Adrian more times than he could count. He failed Harry Potter before he was even born.

Adrian tilted his head slightly as he viewed the man below, barely able to be seen over the railing. Betrayed once his parents. Betrayed twice by his school. Would Adrian be betraying his father for the third time, or had he already been betrayed?

"My Lord, I live to serve." Snape spoke, voice low as he lowered himself humbly to the floor. The marble would soon be stained with blood, maybe organs if his father was feeling particularly unhappy.

"And yet," his father began with a sigh, wistful and toying with the man, "you fled as soon as Bellatrix began her assault such a long time ago. Perhaps if you had assisted, she would be here in our ranks still."

Snape was trembling, terrified in a way that meant he too knew what was coming.

"What a disappointment," Voldemort toyed, the entire room watching soundlessly. "I had expected more, after all I've done for you. I took your request and spared that mudblood when you asked, and since then you have been of little use."

Voldemort stood, Adrian could hear his shoes on the ground out of sight. "I thought perhaps, you would infiltrate Dumbledore's Order but *no,* instead you fail at even that. You fail at passing information I wanted implanted, and you failed at reporting information I *wanted."*

There was a buzz in the air, static and sharp. Snape was low on the ground, pressed flush and silent in wordless prayer to a god above that would heed his calls.

Yet there was no god in this twisted bastardized world; the only being above Snape was Adrian, built on his throne of lies.

And perhaps the thought of that, was the enlightenment Adrian had always needed. The knowledge and faith in knowing that *he* had the right for choosing who lived or died. Adrian had the power and influence to let those live, or choose to let those die.

Snape waited, knowing his impending death and unaware of how his fate was held in no divine intervention, but in the blood-soaked palms of Adrian's own mercy.

Adrian inhaled, and stepped forward, peering over the railing until he could begin to see the black cloak of his father.

He settled his heart the best he could, and hissed loudly into the room. *"I want to deal with him."*

There was a pause, a stilted moment where the room spiked in fear at the parseltongue. He could imagine his father tilting his head in contemplation, surveying Snape and his throne and the curiosity that bubbled under his tongue.

"Your pleas have been heard, Severus." Voldemort spoke, a slight edge of fascination unheard to everyone but Adrian. *"I am interested to see what you have planned."*

Adrian walked forward, the drop would be about twenty feet, far too long to jump down. Short enough that when he shifted into his scaled body, legs and arms useless and eyes filmed yellow, he could descend speedily and horrifically.

On the ground he slithered, shifting quickly and dangerously, the red crest between his eyes and neck flared high like a dorsal fin on a shark. Bright, obvious, displaying how dangerous he truly was.

He shifted mid movement, cleanly into a walking step with boots that clicked loud enough to fall into tempo with a hundred hearts.

'Do I scare you yet, Severus?' Adrian thought to himself, finding sick satisfaction in the thought. *'Do you want me dead also?'*

Adrian shifted on his heels, clicking twice before standing stationary, looking downwards at the kneeling man who had ruled over him for years. Criticizing him, spitting insults, turning a blind eye when students had cursed him and assaulted him with their own hands and shoes. Adrian's blood was on this man's hands- had he realized that?

"Lackluster." Adrian spoke sharply, pausing before reaching up to lower his hood. His face in display, a secret that had been exploited by his father's own hand. "I heard that's what you said to Bellatrix."

Snape didn't move from his kneeling position, hair hanging around his face.

"Look at me," Adrian spoke, voice low like a whisper. Ever so slowly, the older man lifted his head, keeping his eyes averted out of respect. That wouldn't do, not for what Adrian wanted to know.

"At my eyes." Adrian spoke again, voice softer and more crooning than before. Ever so slowly, the beady black eyes met the corrupted yellow and green of Adrian's own. "How many times did you look at me, and decide to turn a blind eye as your students beat me and cursed me under your watch? Well, now you're going to look me in the eyes, *professor,* and you're going to beg me to let you live."

Snape's throat moved, a harsh swallow. Adrian tilted his head slightly, a small sardonic smile twisting his features, "didn't you tell me to *try harder?"*

Snape's mouth moved, but no words came out. His eyes flickered down before they jerked back up, desperate to obey Adrian's request.

The hall was silent, under Adrian's own breathing he could barely hear the soft scraping noise of Nagini slithering on the floor.

Did Snape really deserve to die? No, not at all. Adrian didn't deserve to die either, but here he was. The world was unfair, filled with pain and suffering and despite it all, perhaps existence was the greatest agony yet.

"I don't like you," Adrian spoke, voice cold and young. Disconcerting and horrific in the silence of the hall, "You were a horrible teacher to me, you only looked out for those you liked and how...*unfortunate,* that you didn't like me."

Adrian's heart beat and he tilted his head slightly, head hazy with musings and the cloying thrum of power. "Do you like me now, professor?"

Snape choked quietly, stumbling over sounds before he could rasp out a staggered, "*yes, my lord."*

Adrian frowned, his eyes scrunching ever so slightly. "I don't think you do. I think you don't give a *shite* about all of this, and that you were only here because you were indebted to the Potters and Dumbledore and you could never quite find a way...*out."*

Snape said nothing, Adrian had the distinct impression that his father was rather delighted with how things were going.

Adrian sighed and drew his wand, tapping his fingers against the holly wood that felt so strange in his hands after all this time. "You offended me a lot. Perhaps your heart was in the right place, caring for those you believed should deserve it, but you are a petty selfish man. You're cruel, angry, and bitter. I heard about all the rumors you know, that you only joined this side to protect Lily Potter. I saw how much you hate James Potter, and I've seen how some childish rivalry caused you to treat Skylar Potter like *trash."*

Adrian paused, and like a whisper a thought came to him. "I was going to kill you, but that's petty."

He could see the way Snape's eyes widened slightly, the smallest amount of moisture accumulating as he broke into a cold sweat. Adrian pointed his wand down, the tip pressing against the older man's face firm enough the skin distorted around it.

"But killing you would be too simple," Adrian murmured quietly, eyes wide and childish as he stared downward. "You're going to leave here, and you're never going to return. You're going to run to Dumbledore and his Order and you're going to vomit up everything that you've seen, because that's all you ever do. You're going to tell them all of this, how *Harry Potter* spared you because living with the knowledge that you helped *make me,* will haunt you until you die."

Snape inhaled sharply and Adrian withdrew his wand, lowering himself in a squat until he was close to Snape's face, eyes still not breaking contact.

Adrian shrugged and glanced away, feeling sick to his heart but knowing despite it all, his father would be (*and was*) ecstatic with how things were unveiling.

"I'm surprised you never noticed, in all honesty." Adrian mentioned with a wry smile, "after all, professor. I have my mother's eyes."

Snape stumbled to the table, desperately grabbing a decanter in a shaking grip. For the first time in a long while, Dumbledore didn't even stop him.

Instead the older wizard had both hands to his head, one covering his eye while the other pressed against the bridge of his nose as if that would ward off everything, as if that would end the nightmares surely to come.

"And you're sure of this?" Dumbledore asked quietly, although the two of them knew there were no questions left to ask.

Snape just laughed instead, high pitched and curt and bordering on manic. "I- There is *nothing left* to be said!"

Dumbledore knew that, and understood why the other man was having such a strong reaction. Agitation and shouting was allowed, it was expected.

Snape sat heavily, throwing back the liquor as if it would offer him a way out. A moment later he slammed his head into his arms, crossed and braced against the table. Hiding his face from sight.

"I don't know how to look at this." Dumbledore confessed, feeling as weary as ever, "if the fact he spared you is a message of hope still."

Snape hissed as if burned, "there is *nothing* left in that- that-"

"He is Lily's child." Dumbledore input quietly, the words feeling sour on his tongue, "no matter how misguided."

Snape sneered something ugly, "there is *nothing left* of Lily in that- that *monster!"*

Dumbledore shook his head slowly, "I cannot in good faith turn my eyes aside from-"

Snape slammed his hands down on the table hard enough that the glass tumblers rattled. "He is *foul and twisted!* We both know that based on his appearance *that monster* is the one that attacked the forbidden forest years ago! The one that attempted to *murder that blasted-"*

"The snake, which we now know is Lutain, *did not kill James."* Dumbledore interrupted with a sigh, "I *must* account for that as a mercy."

"Then- then what of the others!" Snape spat out, "what of that- the girl who died in the forest! That blasted Umbridge who was murdered!"

Dumbledore shook his head and Snape looked at him with an expression of utter betrayal. "For all your talk of the greater good, you are a *hypocrite.* There is a distance where you *cannot return from,* and if you don't try to kill that child then this war is *lost!"*

Dumbledore's heart twisted. "I cannot kill a child, Severus. I will not kill a child."

Snape's expression shifted into awe, then outrage. "You have been pampering that- that Potter *brat* for that prophecy his entire life! You have been *preparing a child to die!"*

"Never." Dumbledore snapped out, instantly feeling regret as Snape flinched away from the aggression. "No Severus, if I had my way Skylar Potter would be spared of this all, and perhaps it was for naught or perhaps Skylar *has* aided Adrian Selwyn in a way we cannot quite understand. I will *not* lose faith in Skylar Potter, the prophecy is what we make of it."

Snape's lip curled into something predatory, "You mean to say that you have been *ignoring the prophecy?"*

Dumbledore's eyes sharpened, then softened in guilt. He looked aside, fumbling with his fingers and the blackened digits that didn't respond the way they used to. "I have not ignored it, but I will never treat a child as a weapon. I will not rob Skylar of his innocence and his childhood for the sake of a prophecy we do not truly understand."

Snape's face twitched, "perhaps if you *had* trained the boy, we wouldn't *be in this situation."*

Dumbledore's eyes softened and he looked very sad. "I am sorry, Severus, perhaps Adrian was right. Your jealousy has made you cruel. Perhaps you can treat a child without care of compassion, but I will never take that from them. Perhaps I *have* made a mistake, but I have given Skylar the chance to be happy."

Snape shook his head with a disgusted look. "You've doomed us all, you've placed all your faith in an *idiot boy* and now look at us!"

Dumbledore looked to his hands, fiddling the ring on his finger. "I have faith and hope in Skylar, and through that I have hope in Adrian."

"How?" Severus exasperatedly sighed, *"How* can you dare think that?"

"For one thing," Dumbledore started quietly, "you're still here. And above all else, Skylar carries around a piece of Adrian's heart."

It worked, the stunt and portrayal of himself left Adrian free to roam about with no eyes watching his movements. No threats, no torture, basic terrifying whispers and a fate worse than death and suddenly Adrian was untouchable.

Death Eaters parted and bowed before him, every snake treated with the same respect since nobody apparently knew what a basilisk looked like. Adrian could wander outside, through the shriveled gardens or past Walter the Grifdor who looked in wonderful shape as he chased beetles outside.

Everything was calm and at ease, except the swirl of emotions in Adrian himself.

Was it right to spare Snape? He had no regrets for the suffering he surely gave the man, it was revenge in its finest form. Was it right to let him flee? To let Dumbledore know just how deeply he was involved with all of this?

(He knew, that Luna would understand. He wasn't sure if Remus ever would have.)

He was free to move around, he was free to gather those weird objects that Skylar was so fixated on and then after all that, perhaps *then* he would find some sort of respite in all this chaos.

He knew, that something likely was within Bellatrix's vault; he had been keyed into access a long while back when he was still a child. He would have to actually get into Gringotts, but once managing to pull a few strings it would be easy then. Obviously, once he did that there would be no returning or hiding what he was doing.

The diary was an enigma, although he was rather sure it had been destroyed long ago. That left the locket, which Nagini had hid although pointed out where it had been placed.

He would have to eat it, escape from the rocky crevice and regurgitate it, then somehow mask its presence until he could get back to Skylar and explain the situation. He had no idea where the other object would be, perhaps with time Skylar would come to some sort of conclusion.

What would it take for his father to trust him enough to allow him to venture off unchecked? What would it take, for him to allow Adrian to go where he wanted without fear of his injury?

Luna had been right, Adrian *was* a threat. He needed to show it.

Adrian needed to kill someone without thought, without care, and without hesitation.

(Perhaps then, he would know freedom.)

Join the Discord Server where I'm known to flat out spoil upcoming chapters before they're posted!

Memory

Chapter Summary

> Where Dumbledore and Skylar talk about all of their mistakes and flaws, and Adrian murders a man

Chapter Notes

> Thanks to all of the Discord participants who help brighten my day and make these chapters develop faster! (Shout-out to Jaybean, Arc, Wolf, S4m, Nelchael, and everyone else who helps out!)

'Maybe maybe she deserved it yes she deserved it why did she get to to be liked and nd not me its is not fair not FAIR she DESERVED IT she she starved and i'm STARVING.'

The opportunity came the day the papers were posted, where Skylar's face was marked as an Undesirable and the aurors were purged from operation.

The day that dark witches and wizards somehow gained control, dark magic lawful once more and slowly but surely, plans for hunting and tracking were put into motion.

Muggleborns were to be chased out of hiding, like a porcupine in a hole. Smoked out, waiting to be speared.

It sat wrong in Adrian's gut, it felt *wrong.* The treatment of Muggleborns, the cruelty and harsh ramifications around the circumstances of your birth. Who was he to argue, who was he to really have a claim in the discussions?

Instead he was to sit on the side during his father's meetings, or coiled tightly like a desk decoration with his plume high and bold. He scared the corrupted ministry officials, he made their breathing stutter and he understood why.

(He had to pretend to be indifferent, he had to pretend that the only mercy he gave was something swift and painless. The robbing of someone's life tasted sick to him.)

He stood on one meeting, an especially corrupted official that made Adrian's spine prickle. From under his hood, they couldn't see his eyes but he could delve into their mind and peruse all he wanted.

This man, Pickering, was a half blood weasel who filed paperwork to repress werewolf rights, to allow the open poaching of them as if mindless animals. It didn't pass of course, but Adrian saw his heart and judged him for what he knew.

The man was discussing something minor, perhaps something about goblins although it didn't

seem important. Adrian could tell his father wasn't interested, simply listening for the sake of necessity to micromanage everything.

Adrian inhaled and took a step forward, instantly drawing attention to himself. He had never broken routine before, he had never intervened on these discussions.

"I don't like you," Adrian spoke bluntly, forcing his face to turn blank as he lowered his hood. His eyes glazed and tired, sick looking and cold. Adrian pulled his wand subtly and tilted his head slightly, watching the beads of sweat that gathered on the man's temples. "Your voice sounds nasally, like a rat."

The man stumbled, wordlessly choking on his words. He was stupid, to confident in his position and power to take the threat as seriously as he should have. He choked out a response, already disrespectful instead of being quiet.

Adrian's face twitched and he lifted his wand while blinking slowly. "You bore me, and you're replaceable. Avada Kedavra."

The room flashed, the man died. Adrian pulled his hood back up and quietly moved back to where he had been standing before. He ignored the nausea that rose abruptly, forcing himself to stare at the wall instead of at the corpse that was rattling with death spasms on his father's desk.

His father paused, folding his white skeletal hands together. Adrian could see from his peripherals the way the glamour fell away to pale but pink skin. "You murdered a follower of mine."

Adrian closed his eyes and steadied his heart. "He was disrespectful, father."

A second, two seconds.

Then Voldemort threw his head back and laughed, a sound that would have been pleasant if not for the man the sound was coming from. His father grinned, wide and deranged with white teeth sparkling. One hand ran through his hair, pushing it back until it trickled through his fingers.

"Oh, what have I done to you, child?" His father asked, looking far too bemused. Adrian swallowed thickly and didn't lower his hood. His father looked far too human like this, far too handsome and far too demonic with the bloody iris. "I've corrupted you so terribly. I remember the day I taught you to shield, you were so small and innocent then."

Adrian wanted to vomit. "I grew up."

Voldemort tapped one finger against his mouth, the manicured digit resting on the quirk of bemusement. "You have, I daresay I missed the moment you did."

Adrian's heart thrummed loudly and painfully and his eyes stung and hurt and he tried his best to not look at the corpse. With an exhausted self hating exhale, he thought to himself, *'checkmate.'*

Skylar Potter tapped his fingers on his arm, alternating which finger in a disjointed pattern similar to rain. It should be raining, maybe then it would reflect just how somber everything was.

Hermione and Ron at least had their plan in place, the expanded purse of Hermione's was filled with stolen and smuggled necessities. She assured him the last time he saw her, that whenever they were ready to go she could apparate them all away. Then they'd be on the run, away from civilization and family and completely *alone.*

Nobody would be able to track them, but Skylar's mum and dad wouldn't know where they were also. It was safer that way, *they* weren't Undesirables #1.

(How had the world turned to this? Sheltered away in a safe house, Skylar's life switched around from saviour of the Wizarding World to Bane of the Wizarding World.)

His parents were keeping their distance from him, either his shouting had scared them off or they were respecting his choice to remain isolated. (Was he really that isolated, if he had Lutain?)

Skylar was mad at them, mad at them for the lies and deception, but mad at himself because he should have *known.* Weren't twins supposed to be connected? *Linked?*

He should have known somehow, he should have acted sooner or or-

(But hadn't he? He had Lutain, he was Adrian's friend before it all-)

Skylar choked, a wet audible noise that caused the black snake to glance over curiously. It observed him for a moment, flicking its tongue before lowering its head once again.

Skylar heard movement from outside his room, movement on the floorboards and the low rumble of voices. Skylar tucked himself further into the corner, well aware and dreading the imminent knock on his door.

It took a few moments for the voices to migrate, coming closer before they lowered and vanished. Skylar held his breath, and the door rang with a quiet knock.

"Come in," Skylar spoke, voice hoarse and quiet. He had screamed far too much recently, he had shouted until his throat felt raw.

The door opened, and Skylar stumbled to his feet, hand twisting into a fist. The broken edges of his nails dug into the meat of his palm, any harder and the skin would part and let him bleed.

"Dumbledore." Skylar blurted in surprise, fumbling over his tongue in his sheer bafflement, "I- I thought you were out-"

"Skylar," Dumbledore smiled, his eyes and face carrying an exhaustion heavier than a mountain, "please. We have much to discuss."

Skylar's eyes flickered towards the door, his hesitation was obvious. Dumbledore's expression fell further, accompanied by the slow shake of his head. "No, this discussion is between us only."

Skylar was almost ashamed of how much he calmed, nodding and shifting towards his bed.

He barely thought of the black snake, on instinct he snapped his fingers and pointed at the floor. Lutain reared and hissed, Skylar batted him away, knocking the snake softly aside. Dumbledore watched warily, not mentioning it but taking the seat on the bed that Skylar offered.

Skylar fumbled with his hands, picking at his nails and flexing his knuckles. "Why are you here, sir?"

Dumbledore sighed through his nose, looking a thousand miles away. His hand shifted, clutching the blackened hand and ring close to his chest. He looked unnerved, shaken and unsettled as if all the troubles in the world finally caught up to him.

"When I was young, I had a sister I loved very dearly." Albus began quietly. Skylar's head snapped

around and his mouth opened in surprise, awe rendering him speechless.

"You-" Skylar choked, one hand covering his mouth as he struggled to think.

Dumbledore smiled faintly, gentle and cruel only to himself. "Her name was Ariana. When...when she was young, muggle boys saw her using magic. They were… it damaged her. It twisted her and broke her so, that she refused to ever use magic again."

Skylar bit his tongue, and gazed away in his own shame.

Dumbledore continued talking. "She couldn't remove herself of her magic, it festered and turned her sick. It exploded from her when angry or hurt, it turned her dangerous but in heart she was sweet and scared and so gentle."

Skylar didn't want to ask. "What did she do?"

Dumbledore chuckled once, a low pained noise that Skylar would never forget. "When she was fourteen she had an incident, killing her mother. By then, our father had already been imprisoned in Azkaban, he tortured and murdered the boys which damaged her so. I became Ariana's caretaker, but I didn't want to be her guardian, I resented it."

Skylar huffed through his nose shallowly, "what was she?"

Dumbledore's mouth quirked once. "Ariana was an obscurus, a magical parasite not unlike that which ails dear Adrian. I must apologize, for not visiting and being present for the raid upon you and our friends. I must admit, I wanted to pretend that dear Adrian did not exist."

Skylar smiled quietly and pained. "He reminded you of her, didn't he? The outbursts, the damage. The parasite. You never came to visit him, because you kept seeing her."

Dumbledore paused his breathing, "there was an incident not long after Ariana came into my care. She attempted to stop a fight between my brother and a lover of mine, and in her attempt to stop our duel a curse bounced wrong and she-" Dumbledore *flinched,* a full body movement that Skylar never imagined bearing witness to. "She died. She was the first obscurus I had ever seen, or had Gellert Grindelwald and I dread saying it sparked his fascination with such cruel monsters."

Skylar's heart froze and his breathing choked off into a wheeze. "*You* were with *Grindelwald?"*

Dumbledore looked wistful, "It was a mistake, not for the memories we shared, but for not dampening his fascination with the dark arts. Not a moment passes where I wonder, that if not for me, would the secret of Obscuri and Vitaedax and other creatures remain a secret? I apologize to you, dear Skylar, not for what has been outside my abilities but for the damage and fear my own love has caused us all."

Skylar crossed his legs, thumping his fingers against his thigh. "You didn't know, none of us did."

Dumbledore looked at him with a small smile, "you hold me in too high regard. We've all made mistakes, and in my old life perhaps I've made more than most. I have many regrets, dear Skylar. I've tried to allow you to keep your innocence, the joy of childhood that you can never recover."

Skylar fumbled with his hands again, a strange sort of calmness settling over him. "I know, I always wondered why you didn't include me on things. I had thought that you didn't think that I could help, or maybe I was too young to understand. But...I don't know." Skylar sighed quietly, "maybe it was Lutain or maybe it was Luna or...somewhere along the way I realized that you wanted to keep me from this."

Dumbledore didn't look at him. "If I had a choice, I would shield you all from this. From all my mistakes that only worsened in my attempts to fix them."

Skylar's heart thrummed loudly, "sir, what did the prophecy say?"

Dumbledore's fingers twitched, he still didn't look down at Skylar. "It was such an unfortunate thing. *The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...*I believe that if this prophecy had not been made, this tragedy would never had occurred."

Skylar tilted his head and blinked quietly, mind fumbling over the words with a sense of lethargic urgency. He knew he would remember it, but he couldn't comprehend the words right now.

"Who killed your sister?" Skylar asked with little more than a whisper, "who cast the curse?"

Dumbledore didn't answer, and Skylar smiled sadly as if that spoke the most of everything yet.

"Professor," Skylar asked far too innocently given the question he had. "Are you going to kill my brother?"

Dumbledore leant backwards until the bones in his back cracked and his skull rested on the wall. "I cannot in good faith ever harm a child, no matter the damage or chaos they have wrought. That is my greatest flaw, that in all my heart and in all my glory and ability- I would comb the world to find a way to apologize to Ariana for the suffering I gave her."

Dumbledore smiled, a small broken expression, "and in irony, I shall see her soon. I have a gift for you, a gift that will turn the brave man mad and the most broken of hearts to heal."

Dumbledore pulled the ring off his weathered hand, pinching it free from broken skin to hold between two fingers. "This was a horcrux, my dear boy. I destroyed it, and it released its curse which will kill me."

Skylar's tongue felt numb. "How long do you have?"

Dumbledore sighed through his nose quietly. "Not long, perhaps the end of next year my time will come. I do not intend to leave you all unaided, but I have my hands tied as you can see."

Skylar nodded, "I have Adrian getting me the other Horcruxes, or as many as he can."

Dumbledore twitched slightly in surprise, "I- I certainly had not anticipated such..*Adrian's help?"*

Skylar smiled, more self assured and amused as he chuckled slightly, "yeah. He's helping us, but he doesn't know what Horcruxes are."

Dumbledore accepted it without thought and glanced down at Lutain, who watched him carefully. "I presume that you wish to know the plans in place to target the basilisk?"

Lutain hissed and Skylar nodded for Dumbledore's sake. "Yeah, Ron Hermione and I are going to have to go on the run, Undesirables you know? So long as you can kill that thing, then we're alright."

Dumbledore leant forward and placed his face in his hands, rubbing his temples. "What a mess we

have now. I had feared that we would focus on Tom Riddle's young life to discern the location of his horcruxes, but almost all have been found. All that is left, is waiting."

Lutain hissed, and something in Skylar's gut twisted. "Actually, sir…" Skylar swallowed around the lump in his throat, "there is one thing I'd like your help with. It's a bit strange but...but I *need* this."

"I collected these years ago," Dumbledore explained quietly, walking with hesitation as if unsure of what they would see. "I spent years searching for Harry Potter, I viewed these memories more than any other. Your mother helpfully offered anything she could, but it wasn't enough."

The mist swirled around them, nausea churned in Skylar's stomach but he wasn't afraid.

He barely recognized the house, dark and clouded from time and memory. It whispered gently, the floorboards creaked. Skylar glanced at a nearby window, it was dark outside but impossible to tell just how late.

Skylar could recognize himself, sitting in blue pajamas and thick baby fat. His hair was fluffy and brown, eyes wide and innocent and how that hurt to look at. Another version of Dumbledore sat as well at the table, talking quietly to Skylar's parents. They were in a dining room, too old for Skylar to remember truly.

The door behind them opened slightly, the smallest creak permeated the air. A small emerald eye poked through the gap, looking at them with an innocence that made Skylar *hurt.*

"Harry." Skylar breathed, reaching out although he knew that in a memory, nothing would ever change.

"Harry!" Skylar's mother gushed, rushing over while running one of her hands through her hair in nervous habit. It was strange to see his parents so young, with so few wrinkles. She shushed him back to the door he just came from. Skylar wanted to stop her, to have a moment to just *look* at his brother.

"Out you go, back to sleep! Your ankle isn't well and-"

"It already healed." Harry quietly corrected, ducking his eyes submissively. He looked sad, weary and tired and all too knowing. Merlin, how young was he?

Skylar choked in agony, one hand covering his mouth simply to hold back the choked noises. Dumbledore watched Skylar, no words could ever convey his sadness.

"Listen to your mother, this is a conversation for adults." Skylar's father spoke instead, firm but *hypocritical.* How could they *not* see the hurt that flashed through Harry's eyes? How could they just *let him go when he looked so sad?*

"No, don't go." Skylar choked out, shaking at the horrific sight.

Harry's eyes widened, focusing on something else. Skylar followed the trail of sight, knowing the exact moment Harry recognized Skylar at the table. The pensieve could show everything, every thought, every moment that Skylar wanted to *scream.*

Skylar could never begin to imagine the emotions that traveled through his twin's mind, but in that moment he could easily see the sheer utter heartbreak and devastation in emerald eyes.

"Oh Merlin," Skylar choked, dropping to his knees as the memory of his twin gave a reluctant nod, accepting of his fate and dismissal as if it was nothing unusual. "Oh my *god."*

"I am so sorry." Dumbledore murmured, "I have another if you would like to view it."

"I want to see them all." Skylar stuttered out, sobbing brokenly and clutching his arms fiercely, "I want to see every way I *bloody ruined his life."*

The next memory launched as the ground disintegrated in powder, reshaping itself like a boggart into Skylar's worst nightmare.

No, worse, because Skylar *knew* this memory.

(It was *his.*)

"When-" Skylar choked out, clutching his face with broken whines.

Dumbledore understood, even without having to ask. "After he vanished. You were young, but the memory was solid."

The door opened, the child bedroom door swung open, and young chubby cheeked Skylar launched himself across the room to jump onto the sleeping black haired boy.

Skylar could remember the shriek of rage, the phantom sound he never knew if he imagined it or if it was real. He could remember the frustrated noise Harry made- although he never knew what words he said or the tone of voice.

(He knew it now, he knew it now like the pain of a sword through his heart.)

"Harry!"

Harry Potter yelped, slipping out from the covers onto the floor in a fantastic display of something clumsy. It reminded Skylar of a baby animal, unknowing of its own limbs. Skylar's memory snickered, giggling as Harry puffed his hair and scowled playfully.

"Gotcha, didn't I?" Skylar's copy snickered, straightening his back to peer down at still tired twin.

"Why-" Harry started, giving a small cough to clear his throat, *"Why would you do that?" "Mum and Dad wanted us told me to get you."*

"And you couldn't have just knocked?" Harry muttered under his breath, getting to his feet. The real Skylar choked, smiling at the sass that never faded away. The spark that he could see in the smirk of Adrian's face.

"See ya downstairs!" Young Skylar's face lit up, he hopped down and clumsily skipped towards the door. He turned and called back at Harry with a large grin. "*Mum made pancakes! Our favourite!"*

"My favourite." Skylar corrected with a whimper, wanting to smash his face into a wall.

"*Your favourite,*" Harry Potter corrected without a thought. Skylar cried, and his memory shrugged from the doorway. *"Same thing."*

Skylar skipped away and the memory was forced to follow. It blurred slightly, until Skylar was sitting at the same dining table and from the doorway a tired emerald eyed boy slipped through. His hair a mess, resembling Skylar's father. His skin pure and gentle, complexion soft like all

children were.

"Did you know?"

"That this would all happen?" Dumbledore asked rhetorically, gazing at the scene with a sad familiarity. "No, I never thought something of this caliber could ever occur."

"Harry!" Lily blinked, peeking through the archway and looking back at the table, *"There's pancakes if you would-"*

"I'm okay." Harry mumbled, walking into the kitchen and sliding into the one seat that was available. Everything about his movements screamed sadness, it spoke of something depressed. Harry Potter stared at the table, where a chalice was missing from the table.

"What was there?" Skylar nodded at the place mat, "a cup? Someone snatch it?"

Dumbledore sighed out a wheezy breath. "A mystery we will never know. Regardless, it dearly distressed young Adrian."

The moment seemed to break, and the young memory of Harry turned his head to the side, swinging his legs under the chair. *"Is there something important?"*

"Yeah!" The memory of Skylar blurted, swallowing a large clump of dough with a small cringe. Syrup dripped down his face, the pudgy fingers delved into his pocket to tear out something tiny. *"I got this!"*

The small fist sized griffin gave a miniature roar, flapping its small wings to create tiny gusts strong enough to knock over a blueberry. It paced on the tabletop, totally enrapturing Skylar's attention.

"Where did you get that?" Harry asked quietly. Jealousy burning brightly, It was obvious, that he had nothing to show.

"I hadn't even thought to gift Harry something in turn." Dumbledore admitted quietly, "I was so blinded by the misfortune of the prophecy."

The griffin figurine snapped audibly.

"We all were." Skylar admitted.

"Dumbledore! You should have seen him- he's the headmaster at that one school!"

"Hogwarts, sweetie," Lily scoffed playfully, "You'll go there too one day, Sky."

Harry shifted uncomfortably on his chair, looking down at his plate where his untouched food sat. He didn't say anything more, but his anxiety was high.

"Did he have any accidental magic?" Skylar asked quietly, "as a kid? I'd imagine he lit something on fire."

Dumbledore shook his head quietly, "we will never know what thoughts troubled him, but he rarely experienced accidental magic. It concerned your mother a great deal."

"Why was Dumbledore here?" Harry interrupted, bringing the two back on topic.

Lily's expression faltered, shifting to something unsure. She wrung her hands and looked at the

table with a very hesitant expression, *"Well, we have to talk to you about that."*

Skylar stared at Harry, and watched as the young child's jaw started wavering then abruptly stilled. With a sharp throb, Skylar realized that Harry was on the edge of tears.

"Hey!" James poked his head in, blinking a few times. His glasses were slightly askew, he seemed startled to see Harry in the room. They looked, they looked *so similar.*

"James! Good!" Lily sighed in relief, queuing for the man to come into the kitchen. At once, James seemed alarmed and tried to skitter out of the kitchen. "*James."*

He groaned in protest yet slid into the kitchen and plopped on the chair at the head of the table.

Lily walked over, somehow having a mug in her hands as she twirled one strand of hair behind her ear nervously.

"So," James started, awkwardly rapping his fingers on the table, *"Well, uh. You see-"*

"Honestly James, alright." She started, looking very seriously at the two children, *"Do you remember that there are unfriendly people who are very upset with us?"*

Skylar nodded eagerly, looking curiously at the parents. Harry didn't look up once.

"Well, we've learned that those people are trying harder to find us. So we have to leave."

"Leave?" Young Skylar gasped, mouth opening in surprise. There was a chunk of food between his teeth, *"And go where?"*

"That's the thing," Lily sighed, sliding downwards into the chair next to James and Skylar, *"Albus-Dumbledore says that he'll be able to find us a safe place, but he wants to begin your training as soon as possible."*

"To defeat the death-munchers!" Skylar chirped, looking at James who seemed sheepish at the name.

"I was an arse." Skylar choked out, feeling more and more disgusted by the second. "I was a *spoiled brat."*

"Yes. They don't like you- They don't like Skylar, Harry dear." She directed this time at Harry, "*And they'll hurt some of us to get to Skylar."*

Skylar looked worried this time, *"What- no! No! Mum that's not-"*

"It's okay, your father and I know how to protect ourselves."

"Your mother is right, we'll be fine." James wiggled his eyebrows in a reassuring way which seemed to dispel some of the nervous tension in the room.

"I can't defend myself." Harry mentioned quietly, drawing all eyes on him, *"I'm a risk?"*

"Oh fuck," Skylar gasped, putting his head in his hands and screaming. The noise muffled out the next words, but Skylar could *never forget Harry's face.*

"Or you could come with us. It would… it's feasible."

Harry looked down at his hands, he knew. He *knew.*

"I can't- I can't do this." Skylar sobbed brokenly, "I can't bloody do this-"

"We think that Remus and Sirius may be targeted as well. We aren't quite sure what extend we all are going into hiding."

"Where else? Have you thought of another place?"

"My sister, Petunia. She's a muggle. She has a nice muggle family. Nobody would ever look in a muggle family, especially from a wizarding family."

"Of course it's your choice. You can come with us, or Padfoot or Moony, or with Lily's family."

"But everyone is going into hiding?"

"Everyone is. It's not safe anymore."

"We'll have to be leaving pretty soon. A friend of ours is going to watch the house for a bit so nobody thinks we've left."

"...It's safer if I go?" Harry asked, voice rising at the end.

"No! It isn't!" Skylar *screamed.*

"Much safer. Nobody would look for a wizard in a house of muggles. It'll be safer for you and It'll be safer for-"

"You don't have to make a decision, we just thought we should bring it up and-"

"I'll go." Harry accepted quietly, *"If it's better for Skylar, I'll go."*

"Thanks Harry," Lily smiled, rising from her chair and giving Skylar one last pat on his shoulder.

"I don't mind." Harry murmured quietly, like someone who had just lost everything in the world.

"I can't do this anymore." Skylar could barely breathe, "I- Take me out of here. Get me out of here."

The last thing Skylar saw, was the quiet tormented look in Harry's face.

The worst bit, was that truly, Adrian Selwyn had the exact same eyes.

(Where did Harry Potter stop, and Adrian Selwyn begin?)

"Father," Adrian began quietly, humbly and numb with the lethargy which hung around his body like a cape. "I beg permission to leave the wards."

His father paused, the scratching of his quill on the reports suddenly silent. The room was absent of sound, even Nagini long gone.

"Oh?" His father asked, turning his head to curiously examine Adrian from where he bowed submissively, "I dare ask if my accommodations are...*unsuitable?"*

Adrian withheld a retort, and scarcely moved. "I ask permission to hunt down undesirables."

His father made a small noise, not quite a hum but something of curious nature. "Undesirables, surely you recognize your talents are above such activities."

He was pressing, pushing sharply and causing something in Adrian's stomach to twist. "Yes, father."

"I wonder why you wish to hunt down vermin like a simple dog."

Adrian's tongue felt numb. "I want to make Skylar Potter suffer."

Adrian could see from the corner of his eye, his father's mouth quirk into a sharp cruel grimace. The pale fingers folded together, nails clicking sharply.

"Well," his father said with a sigh that was anything but exasperated, "I suppose that aggression is warranted. He is your brother, after all."

Adrian couldn't suppress the flinch, and his father's eyes seemed to glow in amusement.

"Go then," His father confirmed in a lazy drawl, "and make the old man weep for all his foolishness."

Adrian nodded slowly, turned and walked from the room. He didn't stop walking until he passed the wards, until he passed where he stashed the locket, coated in visceral fluids and his own saliva. He kept walking until the cows watched him sleepily and the stars began to emerge in the sky. Adrian kept walking until his feet bled, and he kept walking *then.*

He didn't really know where he was going, he had no intentions or aim. He knew he wouldn't ever be alone, not with the ink under his skin that would emerge around his throat whenever his father wanted. He couldn't truly ever be free, but perhaps now he had the ability to do what he wanted.

The sheep watched him, walking from lamppost to lamppost. Hugging the curb and old Scottish cobblestone walls. He kept walking, fearing the tracking ability for apparation. Portkey may have worked, but he didn't have a destination in mind. He had no goal. He would have to access Bellatrix's vault at some point, but not until he reconvened with Skylar.

For now, all Adrian had was himself.

In the sweet smelling heather and deep earthy peat bogs out of sight, in the moonlit shadow of a moss covered mountain which towered over an isolated cobblestone road cut from the mountain itself; Adrian found peace.

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Coalesce

Chapter Summary

Where the lines between individuals is something blurred and indistinct

Chapter Notes

Thanks to the Discord Server who helped with the ideas and the plot for this chapter.

'Whatshappening to me?'

Lutain coiled thick and still, head resting in lethargy as the world stirred around him. He felt disconnected, conjoined and segmented but entirely whole. His body felt like stone, whole and complete. He felt itchy, blind as if going into shed and his vision tinted blue. He felt wrong, but no matter how often he looked, his scales remained black. He hadn't grown a day.

He was with Skylar, he had always been with Skylar. He had always been close, sapping and leaching his heat and warmth like it was blood of something divine. Like it was the silken hair of a maiden untouched by sun.

Skylar moved quickly, pacing again across the floor in front of him.

Passing by Lutain, sensed by his heat pits as warmth moving back and forth and- was that bloody *cashmere?* Merlin even Skylar's *fashion* taste was outrageous- heat moving back and forth back and forth- For Merlin's sake, did that spoiled brat *really* have his bloody parents pick out his robes- heat moving back and forth.

Lutain flickered his tongue, the after image burning and clarifying what was real and what wasn't, his memory urging him to flinch although his instincts comforted him and confirmed it was natural.

Heat moving back and forth.

Skylar what a bloody *prick-*.

Heat moving back and forth.

Remus no don't-.

Heat moving back and forth.

Do you know what it is like to be unmade?

Skylar threw his head back and made a noise that was far too odd to ever be considered animalistic. It would be cruel to Lutain himself to think as such. If anything, it changed Skylar's face in a way

his Master never did, his face flushed and his mouth moved wobbly. Lutain knew human's couldn't flex their jaw the way he could, so the expression seemed absolutely pointless in his mind.

"You can't open your mouth." Lutain hissed boredly, watching as the boy's eyes seemed wet in a weird way. *"I'm sorry, my fault. I forgot you were an idiot."*

Skylar turned to look at Lutain, squinting and tilting his head as if deep in thought. It just pinched and made his facial expression even more distorted. Was he trying to intimidate Lutain by looking more freakish?

"Stop that, it won't work." Lutain hissed back snappishly. *"I'm not as dumb as you look."*

"Are you…" Skylar trailed off unsure, rubbing his upper arms unsure. Lutain's Master crossed his arms like that, but he looked strong. Skylar just looked weak and indecisive. "Are you...*talking* to me?"

Lutain shifted his tail. *"No. I'm talking to the wall."*

Skylar squinted and wiggled his nose. Lutain pondered if perhaps the Rat-man would have liked Skylar.

No, both were far too impulsive and timid to ever be friends. It was much more likely that the two would have forgone wands all together and scrabbled at each other with the soft nails human had, and their blunt fangless mouths. Maybe if Lutain egged on the fight, Skylar would summon the courage to bite off the Rat-man's ear?

No, it was pointless to ponder an imaginary fight, especially with how Skylar had resumed his vigorous battle between his feet and the wooden floor. Maybe in the next hour, Skylar would summon the power for a debilitating stomp. Maybe the floor would trip him.

His Master was so much more interesting than this. Skylar hadn't even destroyed a lamp, or smashed anything on the wall. Skylar hadn't even shouted in frustration once, instead he just shrieked wordlessly in a pitch that made Lutain want to squirm.

"I just-" Skylar huffed and flopped onto the bed, careful not to land on top of the large snake. "I just can't *imagine* this."

"I doubt you can imagine much to begin with." Lutain consoled bored. *"Perhaps a cloud. Maybe a unicorn on a good day, although they have four legs which is more than you can count."*

"I just-" Skylar continued on, rubbing his eyes out of frustration, "I can't- I- I hurt *Adrian* so much.'

"Really." Lutain deadpanned. *"Was that before, or after you kidnapped him?"*

Skylar sniffled wetly, and curled up further on the bed. Lutain exhaled. Sometimes he wished he could huff, just to audibly show his annoyance. Skylar needed to know how annoyed he was.

Despite his best effort, he tried. He exhaled in a rush. A small high pitched whistle echoed through his nose. Skylar peeked out from under his arm, looking at Lutain in concern. "Did you sneeze?"

Adalonda be damned. Lutain was going to- he was going to *murder this brat.*

"Don't tell me you're getting a cold now." Skylar reached out carefully, running his finger along Lutain's jaw to investigate his nostrils and mouth worriedly. "Can snake's take potions? Do you want me to get you a potion?"

"If you could understand me, I would call you the most foul names." Lutain hissed back. Skylar used that opportunity to peak into the bright gum's of Lutain's mouth. *"The most insulting names. No. Insults are above you."*

"I can go get Sirius, you like Sirius, right?"

"Horrible things." Lutain confirmed, stumbling through the collection of few names that he knew. Names that Nagini mumbled under her breath when she was annoyed. *"I- I would… Stop it. Silence, Lord...Dementia."*

"What about my mum?" Skylar tilted his head, chewing on his bottom lip. "Is my mum okay?"

"Lord Dementia Salazar Snape Gaunt." Lutain hissed out cruelly, tail lashing around in fury. After a moment of consideration, he spat out an accompanying *"Slytherin! That's you! Lord Dementia Salazar Snape Gaunt Slytherin!"*

Skylar frowned and eased back. "Okay, not my mum. I'm sorry, but you need to tell me if you're not feeling well. You're my friend now, remember?"

"I hate you, Dementia."

Skylar frowned and reached out again, poking Lutain along his side where his belly scales morphed into the small smooth scales of his side. "I'm sorry. For everything, and I know Adrian won't listen to me, so I want to say it to you."

Lutain stilled.

"I messed up Adrian so much," Skylar whispered quietly, looking at the bed instead of Lutain himself. He poked Lutain's scales, nails catching on the plates. "I messed him up and he should never forgive me."

Lutain tilted his head, and latched onto Skylar's warmth. He fed on it, warming his body with the gentle heat that made him relax and feel so strong. Skylar twitched, his breathing jolting although he didn't seem aware of it. He leaned forward, arching over Lutain as if suddenly unfearing of the serpent.

The prodding shifted, turning into gentle smooth strokes along Lutain's spine in a way much more comfortable.

"I would want me dead also," Skylar murmured out, voice lower and smoother in a quiet contemplative drawl. "I've ruined so much."

"You have." Lutain agreed. Skylar scowled, tapping Lutain with his nails as if teasingly scolding the snake. "Wow, you didn't need to agree you know. Some familiar you are."

"Silence, Dementia." Lutain spat out, without much of the heat that was present before. Everything felt lazy, delightfully relaxed.

Skylar twitched slightly, "I-" Skylar paused, staring off as his focus shifted. Unseeing, blank and empty.

"You're a pain." Lutain sighed out happily, *"you were always the favourite. I hate you, I hate you so much and I'm so-"*

It- he- Lutain was, no Adrian was he-

He was a- the rat kill the rat- I don't-

(Do you know, what it is like, to be unmade?)

"I am going to make you wish that you were dead." Lutain whispered, and Skylar trembled ever so slightly. Gaze unseeing, heat and warmth and soul linked in a way nobody could ever describe. *"I'm going to hurt everything you care about like how you hurt me. And in the end, I'll make you wish that you had never been born. Because you know what, Sky? I wish that every day."*

"I-" Skylar choked out, his breathing rapid. His pulse thrummed so close, under his throat like a rabbit.

Lutain wanted to reach out and close his fingers around that neck until Skylar choked and *begg-*

Lutain didn't have any hands. He was a snake. He had never had hands.

They were clumsy and scaleless and odd to look at. A half dozen tails on a limb? It looked clumsy, stupid and thick like Skylar's face

Lutain pulled back, focus sharpening like Skylar's. A moment later, the pulse and thrumming seemed to fade, pulling apart by the fibers until it was torn and ragged but not there anymore.

"I- Lutain?" Skylar blinked, looking dazed but pretty perplexed, "I- I think we should go see Dumbledore."

Lutain sprawled on the bed. *"I'm open to suggestions. However, I am not taking them."*

"I don't know what happened right there." Skylar confessed, running one hand through his hair worriedly.

"If it comforts you, you know very little to begin with."

"Do *you* know?" Skylar asked tentatively, worrying his bottom lip with his teeth. "What just happened I mean?"

"It's not a difficult concept." Lutain wanted to shout in frustration. Merlin knew how much work he was putting into this. Lutain reached out, slithering from his comfortable position until his body draped over Skylar's arm, his skin warm and soaking into Lutain's belly. Lutain focused on it, basking in the comfort before he very clearly hissed with a hot feel in his lungs, *"yes."*

Skylar nodded, eyelids drooping ever so slowly as he gently positioned Lutain more comfortably around his bicep. 'Okay, uh, was it bad?"

Lutain tightened slightly around the exposed skin. *"Helps me talk with you."*

Simple sentences, treat Skylar like the infant he was.

"Oh," Skylar blinked slowly, his breathing slowing slightly. "Was that what happened earlier? You tried talking with me and it was too much?"

That was a reliable conclusion, although Lutain himself didn't even know what actually happened.

"Yes," Lutain hesitantly agreed, although Skylar seemed to pick up on the hesitation. He pulled Lutain closer, looping him over and around his throat. The warmth was calming, soothing to them both in a way nothing else was.

"There, that's better." Skylar smiled, turning as if modeling the snake around his throat. "You're like a beautiful scarf."

Lutain hissed in mock offense. The mirror in the corner showed them spinning, the black cloak twirling around them and the way that the light caught his Master's scars-

Skylar stopped spinning and glanced back at the mirror, taking a second glance as if something caught his eye. He reached up, tracing a hand along his cheek to trace a scar which had alwa- *never* been there.

Skylar blinked, traced the scar as he exhaled deeply, eyes half lidded and pulse thrumming under Lutain's scales. "Come on Lutain, we've got work to do."

Lutain was something Skylar could never imagine life without. It was hard to remember what it was like before he had the black snake, the snide broken commentary and subtle emotional waves of amusement or frustration. It was a second opinion, a conscience that assisted him with all the thoughts and troubles he had.

Lutain was helpful in a way Ron and Hermione couldn't be. Lutain *understood,* he knew Adrian and knew the risks.

Horcruxes were dangerous, they *needed* them destroyed. Voldemort needed to be destroyed, and Lutain knew that like he needed Adalonda to be destroyed.

But now...for now, Skylar couldn't do anything. He was trapped in a place he couldn't do anything, stuck in a location where he was useles-

Skylar flinched away and clenched his jaw, blinking away a sudden wave of *devastation.* Lutain twitched around his throat, and slowly Skylar calmed himself. The waves of unexplained emotions were coming more often, unprompted and unexpected. If Skylar was feeling it through Lutain, then Adrian must have truly had something terrible happened just then.

That was further evidence that he had to *leave.* He *had* to go and and-

(And deep in his heart, he *knew* that he couldn't...he couldn't trust his mother and father. They didn't understand. He had to leave them, he couldn't stay here with them.)

"Lutain?" Skylar asked softly, "you've been with Adrian a long time."

The snake around his shoulder felt annoyed, hissed something broken as if underwater. Skylar blinked and kept talking. "Where did Adrian grow up?"

Lutain twisted, the world distorting and blurring and Skylar without knowing, simply...*knew.*

He knew, and he had to leave. Now.

Skylar turned and walked, he moved to his room and grabbed the small bag that he slung over his shoulder, careful not to jostle the snake. He secured it, and without bothering to leave a note, approached the emergency portkey in the kitchen that would take them to the other remote base where Ron and Hermione were hiding.

He- wait. He- shouldn't he at least *look* for his mum and dad? He knew his mum was likely out in the garden and his dad with her-

"No." Lutain hissed calmly, urging him with a sense of peace that soothed away his doubts. *"They will stop you."*

They would stop him, he had to go now.

"Arcadia." Skylar repeated numbly, and the portkey quietly snapped him into the other safehouse. It was quiet, obviously everyone was spread far away simply for security.

He walked, his shoes silent. Shouldn't they be clicking?

"Mate?" Ron asked, voice quiet as he peered around a corner, squinting before his eyes widened in resignation. "Time to go?"

"Time to go." Skylar confirmed, pausing to stare at the pictures on the wall. They had been burned out, the faces blurred for safety.

Hermione returned, rushed and worried with her bag over her shoulder. She held her hand out, grabbing Skylar and Ron's wrist in a shaking hand. Her nails were painted sky blue, soft and chipping on the corners.

"Where are we going?" Hermione asked in a whisper, looking frazzled already. "I- I had Tonks key me into the apparation wards. We can leave but they'll know instantly and the Ministry is tracking apparation and-"

Skylar cut her off with the name of the street and corner. Hermione looked taken aback, but she didn't argue. They vanished with a crack, spinning and twisting before landing harsh on cement. Skylar fell to his knees, but he didn't really feel it.

The road was dusty, barren and empty without much more than sheep and cows.

"Do you have your trace removed?" Skylar asked, pulling out his wand from where he had it stashed. "Dumbledore took mine off-"

"Yeah mate," Ron nodded uncomfortably, "Bill did it for us, he knows curse breaking so we're in the clear."

"Great." Skylar nodded, petting Lutain out of stress. "Where to, Lutain?"

Lutain told him without words, and they walked.

They walked and walked, until the sky turned black (it was still day), until Skylar's feet bled (they- they weren't bleeding) and then he kept walking (he kept walking.)

He walked, they walked. Adri-Skylar walked.

"What is *that?"* Hermione gasped, pointing down the road ahead of them, down the street where the land broke in the shape of a building.

Or what once had been a building.

"The Earth will eat us all," Skylar murmured to himself, smirking dryly to himself as he pet his friend around our neck. "The Earth eats our buildings and machines. It eats our work and effort. Surely the Earth will eat the birds too, when they grow tired of flying."

"You uh, working on poetry, mate?" Ron asked uncomfortably, shifting from Skylar's side. Skylar blinked, jolting forward and nearly tripping over a rock on the road. He had forgotten Ron was

with him.

"Er, no." Skylar awkwardly recovered, ignoring the slight dizziness that plagued him. "It's an orphanage."

Ron and Hermione froze. Skylar kept walking until he noticed, a few strides ahead of them.

"Err." Ron paused, looking at the broken building ahead of them. "You mean...you mean *the* orphanage?"

"How did you find this place, Sky?" Hermione asked quietly.

A wind rustled the ground and weeds and the charred boards of the orphanage. The fence still stood, although all the snakes were likely long gone. Lutain pressed tighter, Skylar could almost imagine the children playing outside. The laughter, the isolation.

He hated Suzie. He hated-.

"David." Skylar breathed, his head *pounded.* "You murdered David."

"No." Lutain defended although it sounded proud.

The air clarified, the wind rustled Skylar's hair.

'No,' Skylar thought in a voice that was not his own, *'I told Lutain to kill him.'*

"And then Bella found me." Skylar whispered, "and the fire. And all the fire started."

It burned and purified and changed his life. His rebirth, the murder and the start of everything, because of *fire.*

Skylar had never seen such chaos before, he had never seen such righteous vengeance and revenge before. Fire destroyed all, fire hurt others like how he had been wronged and hurt and-

'The fire' Adrian and Skylar and nobody at all, thought. *'It burns because it's something uncontrollable.'*

It was beautiful in a way he would never be again. Gorgeous, strong, terrifying. Useful.

"I want it to burn." Skylar whispered.

And so.

It did.

Hermione screamed when the house in the distance started burning. Small, a medium strength fire charm but unexpected enough that it caused her to shriek.

It was far enough away it wouldn't hurt them, but the charred wood spread quickly. A bonfire, easily enough to put out with the proper spell.

"Shite, is there someone *in there?"* Ron hissed, shoving the two of them down to take cover in the grasses. Skylar was unresponsive, staring away while the snake similarly was limp. Hermione was peeking through the weeds, eyes wide and wet.

Ron couldn't *see* anyone moving, but it was far too suspicious for things to set on fire. They were on the list of most wanted, they couldn't afford to be caught right now.

"Ron," Hermione whispered, crawling over hurriedly to try and whisper to him, "it's- it's on *fire."*

A second, then Ron clued in.

"Shite," Ron muttered under his breath, casting a look at Skylar and the snake. Both were unconscious on the ground. "Selwyn?"

Hermione bit her lip until it bled.

"Right," Ron exhaled, "well, we can't stay here. How big is that bag of yours?"

Hermione glanced down at her hip at the bag that Newt Scamander had charmed. "Big? He, he said it would fit all of our stuff and more."

Ron looked at Skylar. Hermione looked at Skylar.

"Oh," Hermione sighed, "he's not going to be happy with us."

Although all of the wizarding world seemed to have troubles with the economy, the muggle world was positively booming.

Prices were low in comparison, food was on the shelves. Lights and cars and all these crazy inventions were giving Ron a headache.

"Merlin," Ron gasped under his breath, keeping his head low as Hermione lead him across a stripped patch of black street. "Is this how you *live?"*

Hermione tried to disguise the small smile on her face, but tugged him further down the road.

They didn't know where they were going, but anywhere further in the muggle world was the best place to hide right now. Especially with Skylar still unconscious, although they couldn't exactly say they weren't upset the snake was unconscious at all.

"Do you feel bad at all?" Hermione asked, tucking closer to his side to whisper under her breath. "About Skylar?"

Ron didn't blink. "What about him?"

Hermione hunkered slightly further, as if ashamed of what she was thinking. "I- He's been acting weird."

Ron didn't respond, he knew what she meant.

"I mean, he's still wonderful!" Hermione defended, feeling guilty enough for the both of them. "It's just...I don't know, it just…"

"It's the snake." Ron muttered, voice nearly swallowed by a nearby bus. "The horcrux."

Hermione gave the smallest nod, tugging him down steps until they entered what looked like a train station. After a few moments where Hermione instructed him on how to enter, they settled on a fast moving underground train. It was similar to the Hogwarts Express, but smaller and dirtier.

"We're supposed to destroy them." Hermione whispered on the seat next to him. "Skylar said that he's got that covered."

Ron nodded again, "do you trust that?"

Hermione bit her lip. She didn't answer.

The train moved fast, opening and closing its strange doors until they had moved miles away from where they started. Ingenious travel, filled with unsuspecting people.

"Sky isn't the prophecy child." Ron spoke quietly, keeping his voice hushed the best he could. "But...I don't know. It...It doesn't feel right."

"I know." Hermione agreed with a small whine to her voice. "It- I don't know what we're going to do. We, Skylar is our *friend."*

The train thudded through the dark, the lights flashed through the windows.

"He isn't going to kill Selwyn." Ron confirmed, "the poor bloke is dying anyways. What happens when he dies, if that *bloody* snake is a horcrux."

Hermione's scab broke, blood dripping down towards her chin.

"What's going to happen when all that's left is that *snake?* What's going to happen to *Sky?"*

"I don't know." Hermione sniffled, clutching the bag to her lap. "I mean, would it be that bad? He- Skylar *and* Adrian live and-."

"That's cruel, Mione." Ron argued, "he...Mione what does Selwyn have *left?"*

"He's the chosen one!" Hermione hissed back under her breath, "We *need* Adrian-"

Ron flinched back, staring at her as if disgusted. "You didn't need Adrian before you found out about all this prophecy shite."

Hermione balked.

Ron closed his eyes and his nostrils flared. "If you really think that Selwyn's going to just..*help us* because of that prophecy, then Mione you're more daft than you think. Selwyn bloody hates the idea of that Chosen One shite *more* than he hates Sky. You think he'll just...*switch sides?"*

"But he *is* helping us!" Hermione argued, "he's helping Sky!"

"Who he *hates."* Ron argued back, opening his eyes to look down at his hands. "So why is he *helping us?"*

The train thudded on. Hermione visibly twitched as her thoughts caught up.

"You think Skylar did something," she couldn't keep the horror out of her voice. "You...what do you think happened?"

"Well…" Ron's face pinched in an expression of bitter humor. "...I'm not Selwyn."

Hermione inhaled sharply, "...you think Skylar made a *deal?* But- but Adrian always wanted equal exchange for deal- *oh."*

"We're killing Selwyn's dad." Ron's face didn't twitch, "what's equal exchange for Selwyn?"

"No." Hermione breathed and pulled back. "*No,* Skylar would...would *not* sell out his...Skylar *loves* his dad!"

"That snake doesn't." Ron nodded towards the bag.

The train thudded on.

Skylar couldn't comprehend.

His dreams were blurred, but he hadn't ever been aware that he was dreaming until then.

If you realized you were dreaming, weren't you somehow supposed to take control of your dream? Weren't you supposed to somehow change it from there?

He wasn't. He was walking, viewing the world from a different angle. Watching it like a muggle movie, from the eyes of a character within a memory.

But it was different, it was isolating and broken and distorted because it *wasn't.*

The air was humid, the ground spongy like Northern Scotland always was. It was colder than he thought, he was wearing a warm cloak that felt cold paradoxically. His bones hurt deep, his legs throbbed and he kept walking.

The heather was beautiful, a pinkish purple that Skylar hadn't ever noticed before. The flowers were pretty, weeds that others would pluck that had overgrown into something enchanting.

Skylar sniffed, his nose was running. His throat was dry and his eyes itched. The sun was hidden behind a cloud, but the light burned his foggy head. A headache buzzed on the border of his brain, his skin itched wrong.

How long had he been walking? Why didn't he bring food with him? Why didn't he bring water, or a way to separate the salt from the ocean?

He had been walking for so long, the sun buzzed and everything hurt. The horizon distorted, twisting from a heat that didn't exist.

Maybe he should carve a hole into the cliff, blast it until he bled onto the rubble. He could lay there, fetal like an unborn fawn and simply wait for the sun to lower to the horizon and ultimately, end.

He was so...so *tired.*

"You are, aren't you?" The words distorted, in his head and out.

He swung his head around, the ground wavering sharply under vertigo. His skin was dry without sweat.

"Whe-" His voice cracked, lower and unlike his own.

Nothing was there, nobody was with him. Where was Lutain? Where was everyone who ever loved him?

'Abandoned, because they don't like you.' it whispered, feminine and cruel. A coon that was unlike

any real person.

"That's a *lie!"* He screamed, pulling his wand to point it at the rolls of heather. A gull circled high above him.

'Nobody likes you, Adrian.'

He smirked cruel, lips pulling back in a snarl as the ground distorted. Nausea had turned his hunger off, thirst had turned him mad.

He didn't care anymore. He cared far too much and this was the price he had to pay.

Everything swirled, a memory pressed against his side like a hug. He saw it even, the pale arms wrapped around his side, the blonde hair that tickled his skin. *'Are you done brooding yet?'*

"I don't brood." He whispered, and he heard the laughter. His voice cracked and broken like crushed marble.

'Yes you do. You should come inside, you'll catch a cold in this rain.'

It wasn't raining. He heard it, he *felt* it but it was cloudy and he was *so thirsty.*

'Come inside, Adrian.' she coaxed gently. *'You need to take better care of yourself, I won't always be around to help you.'*

He smiled, lip cracking and bleeding. He remembered how the discussion went, he remembered.

And he quoted back in a whisper of nostalgia, "you'll always find me anyways, Luna."

There was a thumping in the air, Skylar's heart thumped loudly in his chest. He was so tired, his mouth tasted like blood and he smelled only iron.

Standing on the road, in the middle of the wildflowers, was a tall black thestral.

Daphne received the letter well past dusk. It arrived in the talons of a beautiful eagle owl, tied hastily and poorly to its talon.

Daphne knew it was a Malfoy owl, they were very distinct. The letter in its grip wasn't its usual sort of letter, it didn't have the appropriate calligraphy or the decorations that generally accompanied it. If Daphne hadn't known the owl, she would have assumed that it was someone else entirely.

The owl came to *her* window, not the owlery where the house elves would deposit the post. The owl was instructed to come to *her.*

(She knew, she had heard the rumors, she had seen the posters.)

She accepted the owl in, tore the letter free and instantly the owl returned to the night and left without a sound. She wasn't supposed to reply.

She didn't know what was in it, but she dreaded the contents immediately. It couldn't be good.

It was from Draco, who everyone knew was part of a heavily dark family. Merlin, what had they gotten *into?*

(How long was she safe? Was this letter a warning? A threat?)

She fished around for a letter opener, prying the flap open carefully if only to procrastinate seconds more. Her hands were shaking.

The letter unrolled, sloppily written. Words going off on a slant, almost as if written in the dark or in low light. There was an ink drop at the top, as if he hesitated before spilling out whatever it was.

She read, and tried not to think.

(She knew, she had seen the papers. She had seen the photos.)

'It's true.' Draco had written, letters bleeding together. *'I watched him murder Bellatrix Lestrange because she made him mad.'*

Bellatrix Lestrange, the infamous mother that they all thought he had. All lies. Because after all of her speculating and fear, it was actually the Dark Lord. Skylar bloody *Potter's twin.*

Draco said that he *murdered Bellatrix Lestrange.*

The paper was trembling in her grip, too shaky for her to continue reading. She set it on the table.

'He's gone. Hunting.'

Adrian Selwyn is gone, he went *hunting.*

"Shite." Daphne breathed, breathing anf voice hitching in the rising tide of her panic. What had she gotten into, what had she *done?*

Who was he hunting? Who was he targeting? Was he after Skylar Potter who was now wanted by all of Magical Britain? Was he- was he out for *revenge?*

(How high were they on the list? How long until they came for her?)

Oh Merlin, *Suzie* was dead and he- he-

Astoria wasn't safe, none of them were safe. Daphne couldn't think- everyone was at risk. Who would Adrian *not* attack? Who had pissed him off the *least?*

Theodore Nott, he was always rather fond of Theodore Nott.

(Why had she gotten involved in all of this? Why did she have to*pry?*)

How many people did she inadvertently kill? Suzie- that...that *store owner in Hogsmeade that went insane after they left?*

They were going to die, they were *all going to die.*

She had killed them, all, and...oh Merlin, she had to take Astoria and run, *now.*

Daphne bolted. She ran through her house uncaring of how loud her feet were and how she nearly toppled a decorative vase. Her parents wouldn't hear, the rooms and hallways were all silenced. Children were to never be heard after all.

Daphne never cared for her parents, they were proud and had high expectations but she and they were never close. It was an obligation and a duty to have children, not a privilege. Astoria was a

privilege for Daphne, and she *had* to protect her sister. Which meant that she had to *run*.

But...the next Hogwarts term was coming up. Only a few more weeks, really. If she moved, took Astoria and ran to one of the lesser known summer houses, would they be safe?

It was incredibly unlikely that anyone would ever storm Hogwarts- the castle had never fallen before. Nowhere in the world was safe for Daphne and her sister, except maybe within the stone walls.

"Merlin," Daphne breathed, clutching her head with the sense of impending doom.

At the end of the night, there was truly nothing she could do. She couldn't *think* of anything to do.

After all, she *wasn't Selwyn.*

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Picture

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian talks about Thestrals, memories, and a photograph.

Chapter Notes

If this chapter doesn't get you, I don't know what will.
In memory for all of us who can relate to this chapter.

And all of the people we never got to say goodbye to.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Make it stopplease mAke it stop'

Adrian sat in grass, crunching stems and flowers under his nails. They were short, rippled in malnutrition. Adrian felt cold, unbothered.

"Why are you here?" Adrian asked quietly, murmuring low yet clearly audible.

The crunch of clawed hooves, the smell of sap in the air. Adrian read once that the smell of cut grass was a cry from the vegetation itself- that somehow grass knew it was being injured and was trying to warn its neighbours.

Did grass know, when it was reaching its end? When its stems turned yellow and crunchy and it powdered into flakes smaller than snow?

"I was sent," Mylla retorted with a huff, pausing before her wings and joints and knobbly bones folded sickly and she sunk to the ground next to him. She crushed daisies under her ribs, her long gnarled tail spilled over wildflowers like blood.

"Sent by who?" Adrian asked with a dry smile, his lips cracking. The sunlight burned, bright in the glare of the blue sky.

Mylla didn't respond, but a small huff from her large nostrils was clear enough to comprehend.

He had water, food. Sanity returned, whether he deserved it or not. It didn't matter to him anymore.

"I will tell you a story." Mylla started, hissing freakishly. It was unsettling, similar to how the skin stretched over her bones and the milky white of her eyes stared aimlessly. Her wings were leathery, large and cracked in the sunlight. He wasn't sure if any part of her would be soft, if maternal instinct still blessed her.

"I was born long ago," Mylla started. She talked in no rush, much more eloquent and intelligent than Adrian had suspected. She had talked so gruff, short without thought. Animalistic, or perhaps

that too was an act. Perhaps she was cunning enough to wait and bide her time. *"I was a good child."*

Adrian couldn't talk. He grabbed a step with a flower, and he began to pluck each petal with purpose.

"I died painfully." Mylla spoke, softly for the first time. Adrian eyed her from the corner of his eye, spotting the long tongue and sharp canine fangs. *"Adalonda was young, half my size and thick as my leg."*

Smaller than Nagini. Adrian pulled off the petals, throwing the stem away from him. He wished it was an apple core.

"Adalonda bit me, and she killed me painfully." Mylla spoke calmly.

Adrian stilled.

"I wondered why for a long time." Mylla spoke, her tail swishing unnaturally. *"I wondered why I lived. I asked, after. My sire said he bartered, his students created something and that created me."*

"Which students?" Adrian asked quietly, swallowing thickly.

"Morgan le Fay. Merlin." Mylla turned her head, face twisted and *wrong, "Father was so happy. He had me again. Adalonda was not."*

Adrian's heart twisted. He breathed out choked, "what happened?"

Mylla blinked slowly, ears twitching around on her great reptilian skull. *"She killed. She murdered children, and I took them as mine. Father found out, but I was not his child anymore. I was not his pride. Adalonda was something I could not be, but he could not kill her. He sealed her away, made her sleep because he could never kill her."*

Adrian stood up quickly, pacing away. He kicked at the grass, sending small pebbles rolling. "That- that doesn't make sense. Adalonda wouldn't-"

"Basilisks are creatures of cruelty." Mylla informed him bluntly, blinking slowly with a second eyelid. *"In her age Adalonda has grown vengeful. My father lives not, but his children do and so she takes revenge."*

Adrian's face twitched into a snarl, "Adalonda would *not-"*

"Adalonda was bored." Mylla hissed out, her tongue flickering through the air. *"So she killed what you hold most precious."*

Adrian inhaled shakily and looked away, "I...I can't believe that Adalonda would do something to hurt another."

Mylla stood, her body cracking like a tree in winter. Her joints shifted unnaturally. She flapped her wings, large *massive* folds of leathery skin that buffeted the grass with their power. She tossed her head, mane flowing and tail swishing in a breeze created by herself.

"I did not think you would take my word." Mylla spoke bluntly, without care. She approached, tall and imposing. It was inspiring to think he had ridden on her back, privileged to ride something so beautiful. *"I believe you will listen."*

Adrian sneered, lips pulling away from his mouth in a sneer so cruel he could imagine his eyes turning golden. Venom in his jaws, strength and power in his coiled muscles. "You're full of *lies.* Adalonda would *never* hurt me."

Mylla breathed, hot and humid between them. Warm blooded, thrumming in her veins.

"I am to tell you," Mylla paused before she lowered her head, eyes at his level as she knelt before him. *"That it is irony. What happened."*

Adrian took a step backwards, not liking how close Mylla had gotten, "no don't-"

"I think you'd be a wonderful thestral," Mylla hissed out in something close to a croon.

Adrian flinched backwards. "What is *that* supposed to mean?"

Was it a threat? Was it something bad?

"I-" Adrian shook his head and stepped back again, "I don't know what you're talking about.

He *didn't,* he didn't even know that much about thestrals to begin with. He had only heard about thestrals before from Hagrid, and when he went with Luna to feed them-

Bu-dum

Bu-dum

Bu-dum

His heart beat, vibrating in his throat.

Luna smiled something soft and sad. Eying the foal stumbling across the ground. Newborn, wobbling on spindly legs.

"You know, I think you'd be a wonderful thestral."

"Okay," Adrian croaked out quietly, his voice strangled and muted in his own ears. "I'm listening."

"I was born long ago," Mylla began raspily, croaking and hissing out words as if the idea of smooth speech was something long since forgotten. *"Centuries, time before you could ever imagine. I was daughter for my father, a great man."*

"Salazar Slytherin." Adrian added in quietly, filling in the gaps more out of obligation to Luna than any sense of loyalty to the disconcerting thestral.

"Yes," Mylla hissed with a small snort through her nostrils. The air was hot and humid, wet on his exposed skin. *"A great man. Have no doubt, he loved me very much. And that is why I died."*

Adrian stilled in confusion. "I- pardon?'

"It is a joke, perhaps." Mylla mused almost scathingly, *"our existence. The concept of the thestrals. Do you know, how thestrals are made, Cerestes?"*

Adrian flinched at the title. He bit his lip, until his skin felt hot and swollen around his teeth. "They're children that die in excruciating ways. We already know this, it's common knowledge."

Mylla tilted her head, skeletal face and glazed eyes making her seem more like the dead than anything else. Her hair trailed down, thin and straggly. It reminded Adrian of Bella's hair, the way it was once likely shiny and something beautiful.

"No," Mylla mused, soft and gentle although barely that at all, *"we were born out of desperation. A curse, that lasts in the world like the Werewolves. Thestrals are made, when we suffer and beg for death under the venom of a basilisk."*

Adrian stilled, and Myllal approached. She lowered herself, front legs buckling on the knobbly knees until her large face was drawing so close Adrian could only smell the hot moist air of her breath.

"Thestrals are born the moment we accept it, the moment we know it and we beg for it."' Mylla hissed out almost in delight. *"The moment we stare that wretched demon in the face and beg for mercy. The moment we beg not for our lives but for the relief of just dying already. We explode from the spine, dripping blood and gore and we are cursed to exist forever because we can never die."*

Adrian didn't realize he wasn't breathing until the hot exhale forced air into his lungs. Mylla pulled back, looking down at him with something similar to pity. *"It is an irony, that thestrals are doomed to live forever and you are fated to die."*

"You're lying." Adrian's voice was scratchy, barely a noise between them.

"No, I'm not." Mylla huffed, her long tail swishing. *"I am cruel because time has made me so. The difference is that eternity has made me this way. Creation, made Adalonda as so."*

"What about her?" Adrian snapped out sourly, "you've been complaining about Adalonda for a while and as far as I can tell, *you're* the one looking like the bloody demon!"

Mylla's ears flickered down in surprise at the sudden shriek of his voice. A moment later she recovered, and thus she began to speak.

"Basilisks are creatures that are born cruel, born unatural and as such they are unatural to all life." Mylla spat out in a croon. *"They poison wells out of spite. They murder the trees and plants from boredom. They kill the children, out of jealousy. I died, because I was my father's precious child who he loved and she was naught more than his beloved creature."* Mylla's ears twitched, *"and once I had been removed, she was the child he doted on until he died."*

Adrian's lip curled. "That story is shite. Are you saying that somehow Thestrals were coincidently made right after? That *somehow* basilisks create this nightmarish-"

"Salazar Slytherin died from the debt he owed to Morgana for the curse she inflicted to create me." Mylla spat out, looking more furious than ever before. *"Blood and bone to create blood and bone. Adalonda never forgave him for his devotion to me, even in death. I told him, how how she poisoned my blood and he hid me from all of those who had never seen death. Basilisks, from their eyes and vanity, have never directly seen death."*

Adrian's heart chilled and he shook his eyes, "I- but basilisks use their eyes-"

"And they are blinded for that moment." Mylla hissed back. *"I told my father of how his precious monster murdered me out of spite, and he was too caring to ever slaughter his other child, no matter how foul. He sealed her away, and the price of my curse came true and he passed away in years. The lineage carried on, broken and twisted and unknowing of Adalonda's spite from the*

secret he took to his grave."

Adrian shook his head, robotically and horrified. "Adalonda wouldn't-"

"Did Adalonda twist your words against you? Did she comfort you until you felt her word was more than that of the sun? Did she advise you secrets that you were certain were worth more than gems themselves?" If Mylla could have smiled, Adrian had no doubt that she would have. *"You unfortunate cursed child. Perhaps all of our lineage are condemned to suffering in itself."*

Adrian stared blankly at the ground. A few ants walked there, pushing strands of grass aside. Ants could move mountains, they could carry the weight of the world on their backs and never stumble.

Were humans the same as ants, to basilisks?

"The irony of this all," Mylla started calmly, sounding almost sad now. *"Is that now, you are destined the fortune to die."*

"Why do you say I'm fortunate?" Adrian asked bluntly, sounding cut off and emotionless even in his own ears.

Mylla breathed in and out. *"In the life of a thestral, I would murder a thousand children and eat their corpses if only the blessing to finally end this suffering. To live as a thestral, is something abhorred."*

Over the grass, a house erupted from the grass. It was then, that Adrian realized Mylla had been slowly leading him to a single destination in mind.

The house was tall and whimsical in a way not entirely unappealing to the eye. The shudders were a burnt orange, the siding a faded colour that perhaps once had been a bright white. There was a fence spattered around the property, broken in a few spots and in others it sported large birdhouses and other decorations. Large glass baubles from ocean ships hung in thick rope, on other spots replicas of garden gnomes chewed on a porcelain giant pumpkin, there was even something that looked like a large artistic owl constructed entirely out of butterbeer bottles.

All in all, it was something Adrian's father would have despised beyond words. There was no modesty, no artistic decoration that looked well placed or designed. It was lovely, homely in the way chaos and personality bloomed.

Adrian recognized it at once.

"Why are we here?" Adrian breathed in alarm, Mylla brushing past him to step over the fence as if it was nothing more than wildflowers under her hooves.

Mylla didn't answer, and Adrian pushed open the gate to the Lovegood estate.

The house was quiet, the front door unlocked. It didn't look like a forced entry, instead it seemed like it was unlocked always. Inviting even to strangers.

The door creaked slightly, the floorboards warped with old humidity damage that never got fixed. There were small scratch marks along the door frame, made by a kneazle Luna told him about. It had passed when she was a young girl.

"Hello?" Adrian asked, his voice echoing through the dark house suspiciously, nothing responding as he inched slowly further inside. Mylla stood outside, resting on the stepping stones that lead to

the front door.

Adrian made his way to the kitchen, smiling in slight delight at the assortment of herbs and plants that hung from the ceiling. Twine and bits of string bound them around their stalks, stuck to the plaster with spell-o-tape to make the dried lavender and sunflowers sway in the slightest breeze.

Upstairs, the flooring creaked and Adrian drew his wand, watching the stairwell in slight caution.

Adrian had never met Luna's father, he had seen pictures that Luna showed him. He had seen the man being wed next to Luna's deceased mother, he had seen him when Luna was a toddler, he had seen him in the papers when the ninth page of the prophet posted a photo about the funeral the size of an apple.

"Hello," Adrian spoke quietly, the house suddenly much more somber despite the light flickering through the windows.

The man blinked, the tired look from his face didn't fade as he approached slowly. "I didn't think you'd ever show."

Adrian looked down, tracing his hand across the rough countertop. The tile likely had once been smoothed, but it had been repaired so many times the texture of it was gritty. Adrian slid his wand back into his holster.

"I'm sorry I couldn't come sooner." Adrian apologized. His voice was small, but heartfelt in the most painful way. "I...I didn't think I'd be welcome."

"You aren't," the man responded instantly. "If I had my wish, you'd be kicked off my property right now. But I won't do that, because I'm a grieving man and you're a grieving boy and nothing will ever be accomplished if you go."

Adrian squeezed his eyes shut, broken nails scraping on the rough tile. "You have the right to do that, if you want me to leave."

The man's face changed, twitching into something sad. "I do, but my daughter wouldn't want you to go so quickly."

"I killed her." Adrian explained softly, voice warbling between them. "Maybe- maybe not directly but...but she was- it was *my* fault and...she-."

"I know." Xenophilius said, "she wrote to me almost every day until she died. She talked about you a lot."

"Yeah," Adrian's face twisted into a smile that was as self damaging as he could make it. "I know."

Xeno gave a small nod, glancing out the window. There used to be an impressive garden, one that grew tomatoes and peppers that Luna would bottle into salsa. Adrian knew that out further there were pecan trees, Luna had told him various stories of her walking barefoot through the fallen nuts to gather those that looked edible.

"I've seen the papers," Xenophilius spoke again, softly and haunted. "They keep sending them to me, those that don't like the Quibbler. Harry Potter?"

Adrian twitched and looked aside, lowering his eyes to the kitchen table. There wasn't anything on it anymore, no papers or bowls of fruit. There were four chairs, all of which were pushed in fully.

"I don't go by that name much," Adrian murmured quietly, "there's an expectation in it, that's larger than just words."

"Same could be said for your father." Xenophilius mentioned, "and not James Potter."

Adrian's lip twitched into something difficult to understand. "Yeah, well. I don't suppose anyone is going to forget that soon."

Xenophilius huffed once, a small sound that maybe was amusement. "No, I suppose not. Harry Potter. The Dark Lord's Heir. The-Boy-Who-Lived. The saviour of the Wizarding World."

Adrian breathed lavender and dried catnip, and tried to remember if Luna's eyes were the same colour as the hanging forget-me-nots.

"No," Adrian nearly whispered, "I'm just Adrian."

Luna's room was beautiful in a whimsical way. The lamp on her bedside table buzzed like a dozen pixies were trapped inside, although Adrian knew it was just a charm. Her room had flowers, it would be strange to ever think she didn't have any. They weren't hanging from the ceiling, but instead dried and placed in bottles and beakers. A set of potion equipment repurposed to keep a bundle of daisy's pointing towards the sky.

Her bed was patchwork in a style that looked disastrous. Nothing uniform, nothing measured. Large looping whipstitch over the seams. One of her pillows was misshapen, the other looked like a unicorn with yarn hair. The four posters were drawn, the canopy was sheer from what Adrian could see.

"This is hers," Xenophilius explained unnecessarily, "I haven't changed it at all."

Adrian crossed the threshold into the room, trailing his fingers over the dresser near the door. A few clocks were sitting on the painted wood, one of them designed like a sleeping kneazle. A half eaten bag of caramels, likely as hard as a rock now.

Dozens of photographs moved in their frames, tacked into the plaster. Silver frames, tarnished from finger's tracing the decorative flourishes too many times. Luna's mother was in the center, waving and beaming. She silently bounced a small blonde girl on her knee, pointing at the camera delighted.

"Hello," Adrian breathed, throat constricting so tightly he couldn't make his breath have sound. The frame next to it had Luna carrying a pumpkin so large her hands couldn't meet around the middle. Another was of a forest, an elusive creature with a long feathered tail ducking just out of sight.

Adrian craned his head back, squinting. There were constellations on her ceiling, charmed no doubt to look like the night sky. He had always wondered why she enjoyed the covered bridge so much.

Her hairbrush still had her hair in it. A single tube of cosmetics still open, the black liquid dried and cracked like the desert. An umbrella leant against a large mirror- a ridiculous paper mache eagle hat was hooked over the frame.

A massive record book for the regulation of cauldron bottoms slumped near the foot of her bed, spine bulging from the amount of steps poking out from between the pages.

"You always did like flowers," Adrian breathed quietly, the sound was closer to him being punched in the chest. From her closet door, he could see the beginning of something frilly and ridiculously

covered. Adrian knew it on sight.

He tugged the door open, breathing out shakily. It was the dress from Yule. It was sticking out, sideways on the hanger compared to all the other dresses which were aligned properly. On display, as if she had looked at it proudly. The material was just as he remembered it, sliding through his fingers. Just as beautiful as he remembered.

Her unicorn horn tiara as on a small shelf, surrounded by bracelets and other gems. Diamonds, rubies, all pushed the tiara was front and center. The prized treasure, something she would look at often. More valuable to her than anything else.

The bedroom door opened again. Adrian recoiled back from the dress, walking out from the closet. He pointedly didn't look at Xenophilius, instead he glanced at the trunk he had brought with him.

"She sent letters," Xenophilius explained, staring at the trunk although he had already said that downstairs. "She- she sent you presents too. The owls never found you- I didn't have the heart to tell her that. I- I'll get them."

Xenophilius left the trunk and hurried away, not wanting to be in the room any longer than he had to.

The trunk was full. Some of the letters thick and bulging, others thin and rolled into tiny slips of paper. Adrian recognized the stationary on a few of them, the ridiculous blue parchment with little stars dancing across the edges.

Adrian choked on his own voice as he drew one letter towards the end, unrolling it shakily to take in the writing.

It was only ink on parchment, a contrast of light and dark. It wasn't anything, except it was everything to him.

Dear papa,

I got a nice grade on the Transfiguration homework, I even got the book to walk around on the desk. I wonder if we could do that to the table? It would be wonderful to eat outside, although it's nice to eat on the porch.

Adrian nearly crumpled the paper with how tightly he gripped it. Hastily he rolled it back up, sliding it into the small space it had been in.

A few of the letters stood out as ones removed the most. Adrian tentatively pulled one out, unfolding the envelope and quickly catching the papers inside.

It took a second for Adrian to recognize them, but the moment he did, *Merlin.*

He desperately flipped it over, seeing a carefully scribbled *'Attempt 2!'* written on the back. There were three others, all marked the same.

Adrian fumbled to open the letter.

Dear papa.

Lutain was keeping me company when I was working on my potions essay. I thought that his scales look very pretty, but I can't etch them for you like the trees. We came up with a wonderful idea to paint with my ink, it's okay I'm sure Professor Snape won't mind.

Adrian grabbed the attached pieces of parchment, tracing a shaking hand over the marks. Clear stains, shaped in arcing scales that undeniably was Lutain slithering through ink.

Adrian didn't- Adrian didn't even *remember* that.

Xenophilius returned, setting a new box down. Things in bright paper, tied hastily with little tags.

"Oh," the man blurted, looking at the black ink scale marks with fondness, "she adored your snake."

Adrian swallowed around the rock in his throat. "He adored her too."

Xenophilius didn't comment on the wetness in Adrian's voice. He left, closing the door behind him for a semblance of privacy.

It got worse, the letters got so much worse.

Dear papa, Adrian said he's going to teach me spells! I'm so excited!

(She was terrible with charms.)

Dear papa, do you know how to keep lysalanders away? I know pumpkin but maybe a potion too? Adrian seems so sad now…

(He bought her that parchment, jokingly on a Hogsmede outing.)

Dear papa, I think you'd really like Adrian! He says after we graduate we can go look for Crumple Horned Snorkacks!

(Her handwriting was painful to read.)

Dear papa, he can see thestrals too, and he doesn't think I'm strange.

(The irony of it, the irony of it all.)

Dear papa, I think mama would have really liked Adrian too.

(He thought he would have liked her too.)

Luna had gotten him presents, birthday presents every year. She couldn't find him behind the wards, either on the Order's property or on his Father's. They came in small packages, mindful of the distance the owl would have to fly.

The first present in order was a quill, pretty with a metal nib. Adrian would have dozens better quality, taken from eagles and ravens and each with an equally gaudy price tag.

The next was a scarf, knitted out of yarn that was slightly scratchy and unlooping from one missed stitch. There was an embroidered snake on the end, black with a yellow belly. The next was an empty book, made out of faux dragonhide with equally fake gold leaf along the pages. She scribbled *happy birthday!* Along the inside cover.

The final gift- the one from the summer before his fifth year where everything went *wrong*- was the best one. Small, subtle and cute. A wooden picture frame made out of something dark brown, glass with a thin scratch near the edges.

Adrian supposed that there *were* countless photographers at Yule; he never imagined that one of them would have taken a picture of someone as ugly as him.

He never imagined that he'd have a photo, of him and Luna twirling and laughing. She wore the same dress hanging in her closet. He was smiling, scars looking freakish and eyes bright green. It was the happiest day he could remember.

The glass distorted as a tear dropped, smudging over the background chandeleurs. Adrian took the picture with him, clutching it so hard he was almost afraid he'd break the wood. He curled up on Luna's horrible looking quilt, smashing his face into her lopsided pillow. It still smelled like her, after all this time he wouldn't forget it.

(The canopy above her bed had been spelled. Sloppily, wavering on the edges. It looked like the view from their bridge.)

Mylla didn't leave, even when morning came and Xenophilius offered Adrian breakfast. Tea, toast, something bland that tasted like ash.

Xeno didn't sit at the table. He left it, standing awkwardly over the counter to eat. Breadcrumbs got on the floor.

"What happened to the Quibbler?" Adrian asked quietly, a low murmur in the silence of the room. The insects outside had died off in the cold, fall had long since approached.

"Shut down," Xenophillius responded equally quietly, "the news is heavily monitored now. The new ministry is strict with what information goes to the public."

Right, of course.

"I'm saving my money," Xenophilius offered with a single laugh that was painful to hear, "I hope that- well, maybe one day I'll manage a pensieve. I've heard of them, and I…"

Adrian understood.

"I'm afraid that I'll forget her." Xenophilius confessed with a twisted laugh. "Not what they looked like, Pandora and her looked so close. But- I'm afraid I'll forget her laugh."

Adrian leaned heavily against the wall, closing his eyes.

"I know." Adrian pinched out, hands trembling. "It- it *kills me*, you know?" Adrian exploded suddenly. Desperately, hoping, *wanting* the man to understand. "I- It was such a...I wasn't thinking and I-...I- *Merlin.* I don't remember the last thing I said to her." Adrian confessed with a twisted hitching of his breath. "I just- everything is so foggy and I come to and she's dead and I *can't remember the last thing she said to me."*

Xenophilius didn't respond. Adrian tilted his head back against the wall and clenched his jaw and waited for his eyes to stop.

"Do you want to come with me to Diagon?" Xenophilius asked quietly, clutching his mug of tea in both hands. "I get the prophet in person now, just...so owls don't come here."

Adrian nodded jerkily. He needed to check out Gringotts anyways, he needed to get into Bella's vault.

Bellatrix being dead was known to the Death Eaters, but to the public at large she was still alive and murdering. The Order knew, of course, but the Order was fairly scattered with how much money their heads were priced at.

It was a miracle Dumbledore was even able to walk around without someone trying to kill him. Skylar's face was worth more than the Weasley's fortune.

Gringotts was just as large and imposing as ever, the outside goblin guards only added to the terror. People walked in hushed groups, tucked tight together as they moved from building to building. Shopping for the approaching holidays perhaps.

"This is what's happened?" Adrian asked quietly, the hood of his borrowed cloak pulled high. He figured his Cerestes outfit would only make things worse.

"It's a different world." Xenophilius muttered back, hastily walking into the post shop. Adrian stuck outside, partially to keep watch and partially to look at the imposing wizard bank.

He knew he had to get into Bella's vault. She was dead, so Polyjuice wouldn't work. There were other potions though, other glamours that would work to disguise himself as her.

He wouldn't fool the goblins, that was a given. If Adrian recalled correctly, he was almost certain that he had been listed to inherit the Lestrange fortune. That is, if Rabastan and Rodulphus hadn't kicked him out of it. He doubted they had, it would make his father angry.

Adrian could always just...*walk in,* but his face was recognizable. His father would know and it wouldn't do him any good to poke around in the Lestrange vault if this artifact was as important as Skylar implicated.

Xenophilius returned, glancing around with a cautious eye. The Daily Prophet was tucked under his arm.

"Do you know any shapeshifting potions?" Adrian asked him under a hushed breath. Xenophilius looked at him with a small frown, ducking his head away from three shady looking figures walking through the alley.

"Polyjuice?"

"Not Polyjuice," Adrian clarified quietly. "She's dead."

"Ah," a pause, "a glamour."

Adrian swallowed and pulled the hood to his cloak lower, "are you talented at them?"

Xenophilius licked his lip and began to usher Adrian down the road, "Passable. Not enough for the Ministry, but good enough."

Adrian nodded subtly, hurrying towards the public apparation point. Good enough would have to do.

They returned, Xenophilius scrambling with his wand to figure out the proper glamour once Adrian filled him in on his plan. It was only out of loyalty to his daughter that he was even trying. Adrian effectively had ruined his life.

Adrian himself was in Luna's room, sitting on the floor and running his fingers over the letters.

There were a lot of them, most of them included a reference to him in name.

"I'm so sorry," Adrian offered quietly, tracing the crease on the parchment. "I'm so sorry, Luna."

It felt wrong to leave, to close the door to her room knowing that he could never return. This place was special, and Adrian wasn't welcome here. No matter what Xenophilius said, this was a shrine he could never return to once he left.

He wouldn't ever see the pictures on her wall, or inhale the sweet smell of her perfume. He wouldn't be able to run his fingers through the mittens she wore in winter, the ones with the hole near the thumb.

Luna had a small chest of special things, a broach from her mother. A letter from her grandfather. A few pieces of twine that had a significance Adrian didn't know. The first quill she ever stole from Adrian. He remembered her doing that, plucking it right from his hand.

Her earrings were pretty, standard like most jewelry was. He couldn't take much with him, living on the run. He couldn't carry around a trunk of memories or a book full of whispered words in the night. He could take only himself, and that was sit.

Xenophilius didn't comment or complain when he saw Adrian next. He ran through the base knowledge of his glamour- how it would only affect skin and basic features. Working around Adrian's curse scars were tricky, the extra strength to change the appearance of his clothing wasn't there.

Luna would have laughed at him, would have teased him with the special light in her eyes.

"That's fine," Adrian nodded metal swishing near his neck. "I know where to get the clothes. I'll be here tomorrow, will you be able to apparate me to Diagon?"

Xenophilius looked confused but nodded. Adrian turned, walking out to where Mylla had been waiting for the day and the night. "I need to go somewhere specific."

"I know." Mylla agreed, not moving until Adrian had mounted. He didn't think Xenophilius could see thestrals, which was a blessing Adrian didn't share.

His ear hurt, throbbing and dripping blood down his neck. He didn't feel it much anymore, or maybe he didn't care enough to feel it at all. The earing jingled, the crescent moon swinging gently as Mylla flapped and then flew.

They swooped low, over the grasses around the house. The flew towards the nut tree, where Luna had spent her summer.

They flew over the marble tomb, as white as the moon itself. Behind them, Luna rested forever, as well as the bundle of radishes Adrian had left in her memory.

Adrian inhaled once as far as he actually could, and then exhaled pinched. His nostrils whistled faintly, his arm itched where the lace rubbed against it in a way that felt irritatingly similar to shedding scales.
This was horrible. There was absolutely nothing about this entire situation that would make this better. It was torture, and Adrian had lived through torture.
The torture he knew at least was different, it was an existential crisis and this was just agony on the arches of his feet, his calves, and the imminent hip transplant. Why was he doing this. Why, were the only shoes he could find suitable for this *eight inches tall?*

Even then, Adrian would have assumed that they would be fine. But no, obviously he didn't understand fashion since the shoes were then decorated with small metallic studs and belts that although did strap the shoe to nearly his knee, it also turned the accumulating sweat into a glue. The fact the material of the shoe was a thin glossy leather didn't help. Adrian almost thought the heel- thinner than his own wand- had stepped in mud or somehow crushed someone to the point they bled. Apparently they made his calves look good. Adrian wanted to cry.

The problem he hadn't thought about was his leg hair. He wasn't going to sacrifice a sign of his masculinity, he still had his pride at least. The remedy was the thin silky stockings that slipped up to this thighs, more maneuverable in case he needed to run than the standard tights. They were held in place by small clips attached to a garter belt that nestled over his hip bones. It looked fine, it had a practical purpose, but the insinuation made him prickle uncomfortable.
(His usual undergarments bunched under the thin material, so it was only logic that he had to choke on the small amount of pride he had left. Lace was terribly, terribly itchy.)

His dress was better simply because it was modest. Modest in the way his favourite dragonhide boots were, comfortable and broken in over years of use. The dress was thin on the tops of his shoulders, broken on the seams under his arms slightly to allow him better range of motion. Warm, soft, velvet that lost its fuzz in some places.
What he *didn't like* was the lace on the sleeves that came to his elbow. They were big enough to disguise his wand holster, a simple decoy since the velvet clung to his rear and thighs . He didn't like the plunging neckline, which made him feel like simply bending over would reveal his navel and horrid tan lines. Merlin, the built in corset twisted against his floating ribs until he wheezed. It took hours to get used to it, and the weird way the ivory bones of it stuck out against his sternum and sides.
He didn't like the massive tear on the one hem, similar to a barely dodged cutting hex. The fabric was fraying horizontally from the initial vertical slice. He was petrified that a single unexpected movement (or wind) would suddenly display his undergarments to the world.
One step forward, one nearly sprained ankle. Adrian moaned something pained deep in his throat. He needed to get this. How could he ever walk casually in public if he couldn't walk? He needed to do this, it wasn't something optional anymore.

"Small steps," he breathed to himself, closing his eyes to try and compose himself.

This time he managed four quick steps- more like stomps, before he lost his balance when one foot slid too far forward in his shoe. His nails crunches against the end of the foot ware, he could imagine the crunch of his big toe folding in on itself. He barely withheld a scream.
Maybe there was an easier way to walk? Could he lock his knees and march? Was it toe to heel-knife, or heel-knife to toe? Was he supposed to work with the wobble or not wobble at all?

What did Luna do? What *had* she done?

(He almost pulled out the picture of them. He could get lost for hours, watching her spin and twirl.)

She had a unique swagger to her, a strange grace that followed her as she skipped down a hallway. She had a smile, a quirk to her mouth that always made him grin.

The house was empty, not even her memory could haunt him here.

(He would do anything, to hear her voice again.)
In some twisted sense, he almost wished that Bella was still around. She could have taught him how to walk properly, how to spin and twirl the right ways to disorient foes or to draw eyes. It was a shame, that in his raw fury he acted so hasty.

It didn't matter now, she was dead and that was the cause of all of this. If she were alive, he wouldn't have to know any sort of this disguise and he wouldn't have to concern himself with heels. Now, he was stuck walking up and down wooden floorboards in the upstairs hallway of a house he was raised in. It had been raided, of course, but the clothing and other harmless decorations were left in tact. Maybe now he could fit in the old shirts and cloaks of Rabastan, although his were in better quality anyways.
He twirled and walked down the hallway again. The candle mount flickered slightly, the lace itched near his throat.
He twirled, throwing in an experimental jutting movement of his hip. The garter and dress shifted oddly, but not in a way distinctly unappealing. It would be distracting enough should he need it, although the true mastery of it all would be his face.

He knew how to curl his lip just enough, he knew how to echo the slightly maddened twitch to his eyes. He knew how to walk, head and chin lifted upwards with his shoulders back as if wearing a cape. (he was used to wearing a deadly serpent, but he presumed not everyone knew that.)

The room was dark, empty and dusty. He could remember sitting at the table in the kitchen, he remembered getting the few harmless books that remained on the bookshelves. All the talons and skulls and dark objects had long since been taken. All that remained were tarnished silver cutlery and the occasional lopsided picture frame. In the cellar, between what used to be large barrels of wine, small cases of innocent potions were mostly untouched. None were harmful or dangerous, which was why they remained even after the raids. Dreamless sleep, minor healing potions. Potions for sickness, and for muscle aches.

They had cleaned the house, purged it of everything except memories. No more lessons in the dueling room, no more shouting outside at the birds that frequented the breadcrumbs that Adrian scattered there. No more dry remarks, as Rodolphus read the Daily Prophet out loud to him.

He killed Bella. He killed her and watched her fall, and from that moment everything severed and snapped. Rodolphus and Rabastan wouldn't look at him, wouldn't dare say anything to the child that was now their lord.
And here Adrian was, walking in shoes far too large for him to fit, in a role he never wanted.
Click. Click.
He spun, not even wavering this time, he marched down the hall, leaning far back and wobbling as he tried to mimic the lazy stretch. His hand smacked into the peeling wallpaper. Again.
The lace itched, he had scratched his neck enough that he could feel the blood raise to the surface of his throat. Raised lines where his broken nails trailed across skin, black lace rubbing irritatingly.
His shoes clicked, his thighs as calves burned.
Again.

He walked and walked, until he was certain that he could pass convincingly enough. He stormed through the house, aggression boiling in his blood. He wanted to destroy the wretched building, he wanted everything to be left for the termites. For a moment, he understood Sirius Black's hatred for his own house.

And still, it was not even close to the pain of Luna's bedroom.

"Okay," Adrian stormed out, Mylla shook herself and stretched again. It was dark now, starlight sparkling above them. "Let's go."

Mylla snorted in the air. *"I was there."*

Adrian's back bristled, irritation either from the thestral herself or the lace that was going to give him a rash. "No shite, you haven't gotten up since we got-"

"I know what she said." Mylla hissed out in a rattle. *"I was there when she died."*

Adrian tensed and climbed on her back. He hoped the sharp heels of the shoes made the thestral bleed.

"Do you want to know?" Mylla asked, genuinely curious, *"what her last words were? What she said when she died?"*

Adrian's jaw locked. Mylla craned her head around to peer at him with one milky eye.

"Do you want to know if she asked for you?"

"No." Adrian spoke hoarsely. "I don't want to know."

'You aren't unlovable, silly.'

"I have enough memories of her to last."

Mylla huffed but flapped her wings, and they were off.

(In truth, Adrian was terrified that in the end, Luna died alone and afraid.)

(It would always haunt him.)

Skylar gasped awake, curled into a small ball whimpering. Instantly, Ron and Hermione hurried over, ignoring the stiff black snake that lay prone nearby.

"He's ready," Skylar gasped, partially in pain and partially in exhaustion. His bones hurt, his blood felt like acid in his body. "Selwyn's ready to meet us."

Chapter End Notes

Link to Antithesis Artwork

Join the Discord Server

Bluff

Chapter Summary

Where the Oedipus Complex is a little too apparent, Skylar does dark magic, and Adrian is an advocate for dragon rights.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone on the Discord, and the inspiration you've gifted me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Howwhy why why did they leave me I howcould they do this to me.'

Skylar walked through Diagon with the hood to his cloak kept low. Out of the three of them, he was the only one that was relatively unrecognizable (ironically). Ron's tall gangly body was something easy to spot, from there the pale freckles skin or bright red hair only made things worse. Hermione could have passed if not for the stutter or the way she anxiously chewed on her lip. Skylar at least, could walk around pretending he knew where he was going.

That, and Lutain was curled visibly outside his cloak.

He could faintly hear Hermione and Ron behind him, stumbling to follow closely from under the invisibility cloak. Lutain hissed quietly, thrumming in discontent.

"Hush," Skylar soothed the snake, stroking it carefully as he turned sharply down one alley. The various 'undesirable hunters' had started to patrol Diagon, sometimes bleeding into Muggle London.

Stupid. Lutain mumbled back, less audible but more felt through the power of whatever strange sickness they had. *Loud, could hear them across a den.*

"Oh I know," Skylar sighed, right as he heard Hermione hiss in pain. Ron likely stepped on her foot.

They ducked down and around another alley, the line between Diagon and Knockturn was increasingly blurred. It seemed that the hags and other uncomfortable folk were leaking into the once cheery atmosphere- vampires were hiding outside of the pet stores.

The world was falling apart, either from the increasingly ridiculous galleon rates for something as mundane as a *sheaf of parchment.*

Something flew above them, the dark shadow moving quickly over the cobblestones. Skylar kept moving, keeping his head low and Lutain close.

The fountain that had always been running, rusted red like blood, was empty. It was barren, a thick

sludge on the bottom from the many years of rust and algae. It was strange to imagine the fountain was every anything besides the home of the disturbing cackling creature that lived in it so long ago. Skylar distantly hoped that such a wretched thing died in the purge of the ministry.

"Okay, we're here." Skylar murmured, tense and exhausted. Lutain hissed out his confirmation, uncoiling as Skylar sat himself on the edge of the fountain. His robes would likely be coated in grime, but he didn't care much for it anymore.

Someone walked out from the other side of the alley, short and accompanied by someone equally shrouded. Only when they drew closer was it obvious who it was, the scars catching in the faint light of the day.

"Selwyn," Ron grumbled from behind Skylar, voice heard yet still unseen.

Adrian glanced between them, spotting Skylar and Lutain at once. He paused, looking at the snake before he glanced behind him, peering around slowly through the open area. Then, just to add to the surreal experience of it all, Selwyn's eyes distorted and shrunk into something clearly reptilian. He stuck his tongue out, suddenly much longer to where it hung below his chin, flickering in the air.

"Potter." Adrian spoke, eyes and mouth returning to normal. "I've got what you've wanted."

Skylar's heart thrummed loudly, he licked his lower lip. "All of them?"

Adrian frowned slightly, the movement tugged on his face cruelly. Adrian's hair was getting long, more messy than ever before. "Most of them. The diary you asked for is destroyed. Trust me, it's gone."

"Okay," Skylar breathed worriedly, his hands twitching nervously. Adrian glanced down, looking at Lutain with a faint smile that softened his face enormously. *"Hello, Lutain."*

Skylar *flinched,* and Lutain hissed out something back, Skylar knew it was a greeting.

"Alright, the last thing you want is in Bella's vault." Adrian nodded towards the alley they came down, in the direction of the bank they walked past. "I can get us in."

"How?" Skylar asked, shifting his weight. He brushed off the grime that clung to his robes, mindlessly picking off dead moss.

"Glamour, the world doesn't know Bella's dead."

Skylar flinched when he realized Adrian didn't look at all phased by the situation. He looked dull, monotone.

"Xenophilius?" Adrian asked, looking to the side. The taller man, still unrecognizable from under the robe, pulled out his wand. He cast something shaky, and Adrian shifted, distorting and blurring into the blank bored expression of Bellatrix Lestrange.

Skylar took an unconscious step back, looking in horror as Bellatrix stretched her arms in front of her, taking a moment to peel off her cloak to reveal and outfit so undeniably *her,* it couldn't be faked.

"Oh my god," Skylar found himself blurting without thought, "Oh my-"

Bellatrix tilted her head and shot him a glare, her face twisted slightly into a downright nasty look,

before it smoothed over once again. "Glad to see it's convincing."

The voice was partially accurate, the right pitch but the inflections were all wrong. Adrian (it could only be Adrian) grimaced in a way so unique to him, Skylar's heart settled almost instantly.

"Right," Skylar breathed, if only to calm himself, "Er, Hermione and Ron are here-"

Bellatrix's eyes narrowed in a clear look of challenge.

"- *although they aren't going to intervene,"* Skylar squeaked out, barely managing to keep himself from stumbling backwards again.

"I should have guessed you'd bring them," Adrian sighed, glancing over at the stranger who had spelled him. He nodded once, then left without saying anything further.

"Uh, mate?" Skylar asked uncertain, still not knowing who it was that had worn the cloak and come with him.

"It's nothing." Bellatrix dismissed, rolling her shoulders and neck, running one hand through her hair. It was average, not quite as namesake as what Bellatrix usually wore.

A rustle of material and Hermione poked her way out, chewing on her lower lip nervously. "I er- I can fix-"

Adrian waved one hand dismissively and Hermione began charming, slowly shaping the long curls into the trademark style.

"Great." Bellatrix sighed (*Merlin* it was scary), reaching out with one slender hand to Lutain. The snake without hesitation coiled, twisting up and around her arm until the gleaming scales and lace patterns made her the embodiment of the dark.

"Granger," Adrian clipped out, looking at the girl with an unimpressed look, "I need you to transfigure Skylar."

"What! No!" Ron emerged from under the cloak, looking absolutely furious, "transfiguration is dangerous!"

Lutain hissed and Adrian rolled his eyes, "Do it or you can't come with."

"Hermione, do it." Skylar demanded, matching Adrian in the eye. A moment past, neither of them looked away.

Skylar couldn't withhold his scream of surprise the moment his legs and arms were gone, when he was slumping towards the ground very quickly with no way to slow himself.

A hand grabbed him around the midsection, righting him up until he was looking at a *very* large face.

"There we are," Adrian grinned, a mad twinkle in his eye. His lips pulled a little sharper, a little more feral, and it was Bellatrix back from the dead.

"He's worse than you, Master." Lutain spoke, startling Skylar into being speechless. He knew rationally that if he was a snake, he should be able to comprehend the snake language- but he hadn't ever thought he would actually *talk* with Lutain.

"Don't be rude, it took me weeks of practicing to get slithering down." Adrian deflected calmly,

bopping Lutain's nose gently like an old friend.

"He flails there, like a worm." Lutain noted dryly although with an obvious edge of amusement, *"he's fat."*

"I am not!" Skylar argued back, alarmed by the hissing noise and the fact he could *understand it.*

Adrian's mouth quirked upwards, eyes searing into his.

"He's fine," Adrian translated to the fretting Hermione and Ron, "we're going into Gringotts. Don't follow us, and for Merlin's sake stay out of sight."

Ron flushed again, but before he could truly argue Adrian had turned and walked off. Shoes clicking on cobblestone- miraculously stable.

The hags glanced at them once before nearly diving out of the way. Adrian twirled his wand- *Skylar's wand-* between his fingers. Glamoured to look long and thin, dexterous around the wood.

"Why do you need his wand?" Lutain asked, grouchy although content around the glamoured neck.

"He can't carry it like that," Adrian responded without a pause, *"swallowing a wand isn't fun, no matter how Nagini does it."*

"You swallowed a wand?"

Adrian's mouth quirked upwards ever so slightly. *"You've missed out on a lot, Lutain."*

Lutain fell silent, and Skylar shifted from his weird constricted grip around Adrian's shoulder.

"When were you going to tell me?" Adrian asked, breaking the silence. They kept walking, eyes watching from the alleys. *"About Adalonda."*

Lutain tensed, firming so hard Skylar was afraid he had been petrified.

"Master I-"

"You didn't think I'd believe you." Adrian soothed him with a sad sound, *"I know. I know now, and I'm guessing that's why he's been with you, Skylar."*

Skylar would have swollowed if he could.

"We made a deal." Skylar consoled, his voice weak and wavering even in accented hisses, *"He- he said that- I said I'd kill Adalonda-"*

Adrian *laughed,* a single curt noise that trailed off into giggles infected with madness. A woman hurried along from where she walked far ahead on the street. *"Good luck. That snake knows every trick there is. She needs to die, or I'll die trying."*

"Master-"

"Lutain, I love you to death but if you keep talking I'm going to tie you to a balloon and send you into the sky."

Skylar let out a burst of incredulous laughter- was this what all of those suspected conversations were? Adrian and Lutain exchanging sarcasm?

"Oh, don't get me started, Lutain." Adrian continued, giving a single terrifying grin at one curious hag in a window, *"you've been keeping secrets from me and I'm very mad."*

"I can tell master, you've practically burned down the entire alley!"

There wasn't a fire in sight.

"Burn down one train compartment once…" Adrian trailed off, although his tone was very clearly affectionate. They turned the corner, approaching Gringotts from the side.

From there, the show truly began.

The change was visible as well as felt. The smooth walk changed into something jerky, teetering as if they were constantly on the edge of falling over. Adrian began giggling, a low vibrating cackle that sounded delighted and reminiscent of the night he destroyed the couch with Sirius. Skylar wouldn't ever forget it.

They approached the steps, Adrian *jumping* up the two stone blocks before he landed on the heels, fumbling slightly before recovering. They waltzed into the building, witches and wizards struggling to get past the new goblin restrictions for vault ownership palled at the sight.

All at once, they bolted, one even screamed in fright when Bellatrix Lestrange seemingly waved at her.

"Well!" Adrian began, throwing his voice high into a terrible pitch, "now *that's* done-" he trailed off, almost singing.

Then slammed both hands down on the nearest goblin desk. The creature didn't startle, although it did blink twice quickly.

"I want in my vault." Adrian snapped out, shifting back and altering his weight until a single glamoured hip stuck out far, "*now."*

The goblin paused, and took off its glasses. It folded them carefully, before squinting down at Adrian with a frown.

"Is it beyond your knowledge," it began, a low voice that could clearly be heard throughout the entire empty lobby of the building, "that we can sense glamours and spells?"

Adrian shifted his posture, crossing his arms. A small delighted grin pulling on his face.

"We've been caught." Skylar fretted, barely resisting the urge to bolt. *"We've got to run-"*

"How you've managed to live this long is a mystery." Lutain deadpanned from next to him. *"Let Master work."*

"I am aware," Adrian nodded, arching his eyebrows when the smallest flash of confusion flickered through the goblin's expression. "Oh, not expecting that? I look like this so I could get rid of the *pests."*

"Yes," Lutain thrilled in delight, *"call them rats, call them rats-"*

"They were rats, and I ah, came to exterminate." Adrian twirled one strand of hair around his hand, using Skylar's wand pointedly.

Lutain sighed happily, *"I love when master calls people rats."*

Skylar was feeling very overwhelmed very quickly.

"I see." The goblin confirmed, pausing a moment before recovering, "my name is Rangok, how may I assist you today?"

Adrian slumped against the desk, keeping in the persona as long as he could given that the doors were public access. "I wan't in my *vault."*

The goblin's face didn't change. "With the obvious glamour, we can not confirm your vault. Have you provided a key?"

Adrian *pouted,* Skylar felt like he was going to faint.

"I don't *need* a key." Adrian snapped out pointedly, "Take me to the Lestrange vault *now."*

The goblin's face darkened, "you are not Bellatrix Lestrange-"

"I'm not." Adrian confirmed pointedly, tapping his neck where Lutain was coiled pointedly, "but I have permission to enter, don't I *Rangok?"*

The goblin's mouth twitched, "you are not Mrs. Lestrang-"

"Lutain, it's show time." Adrian hissed, watching as the goblin stilled as well as all others in the room, *"put on a show."*

"Perhaps if you watch, you may one day be something not stupid." Lutain sniped at Skylar before slithering down, coiling quickly and pointedly in a large dangerous mass of scales. A hiss, arching towards the goblin and a flash of fangs.

"...I see." The goblin swallowed with a pause, "...all recognized parselmouths *are* granted access to the Lestrange vault, however a blood identification would be preferred-"

"I'm sure you don't want to do that." Adrian grinned, his tone dripping something dry and harsh and downright *cruel,* "I have a bit of a...*vitaedax problem."*

The goblin paled, looking outright ill. Hushed whispers spread throughout the room, a few goblins outright leaving and abandoning their desks.

"...I see." The goblin managed to choke out, Lutain nothing in place of the new threat. The presence of an outright *bioweapon.* "...In that case, follow me, Mrs…?"

The goblin trailed off awkwardly, and Adrian didn't provide a name. Lutain coiled around his arm again, and they were moving.

"Wow," Skylar breathed, more in shock than anything, *"this is what happens?"*

"Amazing the weight my name carries, Potter." Adrian dryly remarked, the goblin flinching at the use of parseltongue. *"Of course, you wouldn't know anything about that."*

Skylar snorted at the dry sarcasm, Lutain even huffing slightly in delight.

They walked through the back of the hallway, back towards the mine shafts that would take them down. Goblins would easily fight to the death to protect their gold, but an outbreak of Vitaedax? The spilling of blood and the release of a parasite that would *never be removed* would absolutely ruin everything. They would close the bank, desperate to contain the outbreak.

Adrian was a living walking bartering chip- and they hadn't even the confirmation that he *was* a parseltongue, or that he *was* with the parasite.

It was...it was a horrifying bluff.

The goblin stiffly got into the cart, Adrian climbing in after to politely fold the edges of his dress before taking a seat. He huffed, remaining in character- Bellatrix Lestrange was someone he was not but for as long as he pretended to be her, the goblins couldn't get a read on him.

"Hang on," Skylar warned Lutain, who tightened instantly at the first movement.

They went down the tunnels along the rails much quicker than normal. Skylar was starting to think that it was the goblin's bad attempt to shake them out of the cart.

They kept spiraling, down towards the noble house vaults which were all locked up except apparently, they were an exception.

The goblin wasn't looking happy, especially when Lutain brushed against his arm.

A large waterfall poured ahead of them, shimmering a pale silver. The goblin was adjusting the moment it spotted it, angling itself to peer back at Adrian.

"Detection spell!" Skylar hissed out, rapidly struggling to uncoil himself, *"washes away spells!"*

Skylar was momentarily surprised when Adrian reacted so quickly, reaching around to shrug off both snakes before he stepped back, flipping out his wand to point it at the goblin. The spell washed over them both, leaving Skylar spluttering and shaking water from his hair and scrambling to clear the sulfuric spelling spell out of his eyes. Skylar gagged, coughing out fluid before he forced himself to his knees, squinting in the dark to comprehend the new state of the cart.

Adrian had Skylar's wand pointing at the goblin- who had Lutain around his throat. The scene would have been a relief, if not for the outfit Adrian was wearing.

"Merlin's beard," Skylar wheezed, slamming into the side of the cart on one sharp turn, "are you wearing heels?"

Adrian flushed, a bright red along his cheekbone that wouldn't have been seen if not for the lantern, "get up before I bloody step on you."

Skylar wheezed out a laugh and pulled himself upright, wincing as he slammed into the edge of the cart again. He took his wand back from Adrian, who pulled out a *different* wand from inside a lacy sleeve.

It was shorter, a bright inviting wood. Skylar had never seen it before in his life.

"Hurry up!" Lutain snapped, drawing attention from the two, *"he's fighting!"*

Adrian grunted as he slammed into the side of the cart, Skylar struggled to remain on his feet.

"Aren't you a bloody seeker?" Adrian growled out, tripping backwards as Skylar stumbled forward again, "where's that bloody balancing act?"

"I used it up being the golden boy!" Skylar shouted back, smiling exhilarated as Adrian gave a loud bark of unexpected laughter.

They were nearing a sharp turn, one that the goblin was rather devoted to throwing them over the

edge. Lutain realized it instantly, the thrum of panic and adrenaline pulsing through Adrian, his horcrux, and Skylar all in one.

Curse it! Three minds screamed at once, and Skylar reacted under the minds of multiple.

"Imperio!" The goblin tensed, gasping in surprise before going docile, recovering the cart into a much safer route. Adrian let out a breath of relief, Lutain mirroring it as he released his grip around the goblin's shoulder.

Skylar slumped downwards, legs folding under him. He stared, sightless until the cart came to a gentle stop outside a large elaborate door.

"Skylar," Adrian started, nudging him with one high heel, "Skylar get up."

Skylar lolled, limp and eyes blown. Adrian prodded him again, mentally cursing the moment he recognized the look of dark magic addiction.

"Is he asleep?" Lutain asked, coming closer to the prone body.

"No," Adrian sighed, stretching and trying to release the tight clench of his knuckles, "the idiot likely hasn't ever used a dark spell before. He'll he like this for a while, at least the goblin slowed us down."

Lutain made a small noise of agreement, glancing at the Lestrange vault.

Adrian knew roughly what to look for, he knew the rough feel of what he had to find. The best example was the locket, hidden low out of sight in the gap of his sternum and the bones of the corset. The vaults were cold, Adrian shivered as air drifted between his thighs.

Adrian stumbled out of the cart, walking across the stone path. His shoes clicked obscenely, echoing for seconds afterwards through the empty tunnels around them. Lutain slithered after, the sound of scales on stone was reminiscent of the chamber.

"Why are you in a dress?"

"You know, Lutain," Adrian sighed through his nose, "I would greatly appreciate never talking about this again."

The large door recognized Adrian, he was permitted access after all. Adrian hadn't ever seen the vault, but he always thought it would be larger. He supposed, that his father's plan to crash the economy must have caused the money to be withdrawn. Very little coins remained. Instead, there were large mounds of artifacts, shimmering goblets and plates with ornate gems molded into the handle. Giant mirrors with beautiful frames, paintings with absent portraits inside. It was expensive and lavish in every sense.

"Okay," Adrian sighed to himself, looking through the assortment of cutlery and precious artifacts. "It would be much more helpful if I knew what I was actually looking for."

Lutain shifted uncomfortably, but didn't say anything else.

There was only one thing in the room that had an inexplicable draw to it, similar to how the chain around his neck tugged on his heart. There was a beauty in it, a wordless whisper to *cherish me, love me,* and it was suddenly the most beautiful thing Adrian had ever seen.

"I found it," Adrian spoke, eyes not leaving the cup. He walked forward, knocking into other things

along the ground. They vibrated worryingly before settling, recognizing him as being permitted inside.

The cup likely couldn't be summoned, so Adrian walked forward until he could reach it by standing on a small table carved from a single piece of ivory. The cup was warm in his fingers, searingly so. Then, it cooled and glistened in his grip.

"So this is it," Adrian started to murmurer, tracing the details and the carefully crafted badger on the side, "this is all that Skylar wanted. Curious, why would he want *this,* Lutain?"

Lutain had stayed by the door, intelligent enough to rationalize that crossing into the vault may trigger an alarm. *"We should go, Master."*

Adrian frowned, tracing the cup again. "I shouldn't listen to you. You left me, you know. You left me when you shouldn't have."

"Master-"

"Maybe I should leave *you* this time."

"Master!"

Adrian turned, looking in the direction of the cart. Skylar had recovered, stumbling his way out of the transportation, and was on his knees vomiting onto the stone. It was gross, a thick mixture of digested food that came out of his nose in sludgy bubbles.

"Gross." Lutain commented, as if *he* weren't a creature which commonly regurgitated food.

Adrian walked back, dress swishing. His stockings had been torn over his left leg, likely caught on one of the gaudy knives on display in the vault. "Get up, I got your bloody cup."

Skylar heaved again, trembling on all fours. Adrian made a small noise of frustration, lowering himself into a squat to try and push the other aside. The corset was really impeding with his ability to move.

"Come on, let's go." Adrian tried, shoving the boy to a seated position against the back of the cart, "snap out of it."

"How can you stomach it?" Skylar gasped, body trembling. He rubbed his sleeve against his mouth, smearing the excess saliva that dripped from the corner of his lip. "H-how can you *stand* it?"

Adrian felt a chill go down his back, a small tang that things were *wrong.* He closed his eyes, and steadied himself. "If I do it, then someone else doesn't have to."

Skylar looked at him, as if he were someone on his deathbed.

'I suppose,' Adrian thought to himself quietly, *'that I am.'*

"I don't want you to die." Skylar confessed shakily, "I- I just got you back and I-"

"No. You didn't." Adrian sharply cut him off. "You did *not* just...*get me back.* You-"

"What are you talking about?" Skylar whispered, eyebrows narrowing in confusion, "you left us after Umbridge, and we couldn't find you. You were *gone,* and...I don't know. Some part of you was *wrong,* like you had gone mad. And you're back now, you're the Selwyn I remember."

Adrian sat back on his heels, completely floored.

Skylar looked down at the rancid smelling vomit next to him, making a noise of disgust. "Wanna know something stupid? I thought I could...I could get through this whole bloody thing without killing anyone. I dunno, I just...it never felt *right.* I thought with that bloody prophecy maybe there was a way around it."

"There isn't." Adrian spoke back numbly. "The prophecy is now void."

Skylar looked at him with a wry twist to his mouth, not quite a smile but not a frown.
"You *really* think that?"

A pause, a second that stretched forever.

"We need to go." Adrian muttered, forcing himself upright. His dress flared, he looked at it in annoyance. How he would kill for his proper cloak, even his Cerestes cloak instead of his deceased maternal figure's wardrobe.

"You look like a goddamn sight." Skylar giggled out, half exhausted and the other half mentally jello. "Should have had a pageant at Hogwarts, you'd have won."

Adrian scoffed and Skylar shook his head, shuffling away from the cart. The goblin stood there, wide dopey smile across its face.

"We can't leave it here." Adrian noted, nodding towards the goblin, "He knows what we look like, he knows what we took. If this thing is as important as you say, he can't leave here alive."

Skylar inhaled hoarsely and closed his eyes. "I'm not going to kill him."

Adrian's expression was fairly flat. "You won't have to. Lutain- what was that you said you smelled?"

Lutain hissed back and Skylar sharpened at the unexplained knowledge that forced itself into his mind. "No- no a *dragon?"*

Adrian looked at him with an expression of surprise, scars twisting across his face. "How did you…"

Skylar shook his head and ran past, reaching down to mindlessly snatch Lutain who adjusted in his grip. Lutain coiled, shouting about the passage ahead. Lutain was right, there *was* a dragon. Large, pale white although clearly from neglect.

Adrian caught up, and a high pitched whine broke from his mouth. "Oh no *no,* what did they *do* to you…" Adrian moaned quietly, approaching before the beast snapped its head up, peering around with sightless eyes.

Hurt, Lutain thought sadly Skylar feeling just as sickened as before.

"What species is it?" Skylar asked quietly, the dragon snapped its head around, spitting and hissing furiously. Its face was a mess of scars over scales, broken horns and other marks deep into its muscle.

"I don't even know." Adrian whispered, shaking his head slowly. "It- it's a hind leg dragon, look at the fore-claws on it."

The dragon twisted, looking right at them behind the blind eyes. It snarled, opening its maw, half of the teeth were broken or crooked. Its tongue was dark blue, long in its mouth and forked on the end.

A moment later, a molten liquid squirted out and bright red fire shot out with heat and light brighter than Fiendfyre.

Adrian and Skylar dodged, hiding behind the rock wall where the dragon's flame couldn't reach. Adrian looked hauntedly ahead, staring at nothing.

"Lutain," Adrian scrambled, thinking rapidly, "I- did you get-"

Another plume of fire and Skylar was tucking the snake inwards away from the heat. It was suffocating, searing their lungs.

"I-" Adrian scrambled, eyes wide in panic as he fretted quickly, "I- they may have trained it-"

Another plume, and Skylar realized sharply that he was screaming.

"Selwyn!"

"I don't know!"

Another plume, something broke away and fell- rock glowing red and melting on the edges. The dragon roared, the ground shook and Skylar's teeth rattled in his mouth.

Lutain was squirming, not out of hope but out of sheer panic. Terror, bleeding through from one to another. Adrian was terrified, so was Skylar.

"Focus!" Skylar shouted, barely heard over the gnashing teeth just out of sight, "I'm not Selwyn! You are! *Bloody think Adrian!"*

Adrian nodded jerkily, shoving his head back against the rock to think desperately. "I-"

Another plume of flame, the ground was glowing orange around them, likely to burn clear through their shoes.

"Opaleye!" Adrian screamed, eyes wide and the whites showing like he were possessed, "Antipodean Opaleye! That or a Ironbelly but Opaleye are- are said to be part of the Rainbow Serpent!"

"The *what?"* Skylar screamed back, desperately summoning water to try and cool the rock around them. The water evaporated on touch, hissing into steam. It was too hot, it was too burning and singing their skin.

They were going to bake alive.

"The- the Borlung! The Dhakkan!" Adrian was shouting, scrambling through his encyclopedia of information.

"Do you have anything *helpful* in your list of *useless information?'*

"They're nicknamed Taipan!" Adrian bellowed back, face red from shouting.

"What does that *mean?"*

"That I hope to Merlin I'm *right!"* Adrian shouted back, before shoving himself forward over the glowing stone frantically. The long trail of his dress burst into fire, parts of his shoes began to melt.

Skylar opened his mouth to scream as Adrian forced himself into the direct path of the chained dragon. Adrian opened his mouth and *hissed.*

The dragon paused, tilting its head and rearing back like an inquisitive bird. It paused, opening and closing its mouth before rumbling out a low noise. Adrian panted, chest heaving to get air in the lethally hot room and the tight confines of the corset.

The dragon grumbled again, and Adrian hissed back. Finally, Adrian hung his head and *laughed.*

"What-" Skylar asked, his throat hoarse and torn from the hot air and the screaming. "You- you can talk to *dragons?"*

"No," Adrian croaked out, equally exhausted, "Taipan, Sky, a *taipan."*

Skylar ran one hand through his sweat soaked hair, "that means absolutely *nothing* to me and you bloody well know that."

Adrian *laughed,* "Taipan! That's Lutain! It isn't a species it's a bloody *ancestor!* This dragon is related to a serpent!"

The dragon tilted its head curiously and warbled, its long forked tongue flickered through the air.

Skylar found himself a patch of not flaming ground, putting out the flames on Adrian's dress and trying his best to fix the damage to his shoes, "I thought you said it was an Iron Belly?"

"Oh, well, no." Adrian confessed, suddenly looking partially sheepish and uncertain, "I uh, well I guessed."

Skylar's eyebrows rose to his soot singed hairline, "you *guessed?"*

Adrian shrugged, Skylar looked upwards at the top of the cavern and exhaled slowly. "Mate, you're bloody awful."

"Yeah well," Adrian argued back, tentatively touching the dragon's massive head with his hands. The creature was adamant that Adrian touch its snout, seemingly forgetting that it had been trying to murder them earlier. "It's in my blood."

Skylar paused before snorting, "that's downright *terrible."*

Adrian smiled, almost shyly. He traced the dragon, careful to avoid the blinded eyes. Skylar felt a deep resonating sense of beauty for the creature, a sense of awe and respect he could never describe.

"How about we get you a snack?" Adrian murmured to himself, "an eye for an eye."

He traced along the deep gouges on its face, inflicted by goblin swords.

A tooth for a tooth.

(Skylar looked away, and tried to remember that the goblin deserved it for ever harming something as sacred as a dragon.)

The chains were thick, strong but ultimately weak to certain spells.

They stayed down there longer than expected, Adrian trying to coax a spell from Skylar's wand.

(*It's easy,* he said, *It makes you feel wonderful, but you'll only have to do it twice. Never again.*)

(*I don't want to do this, is this dark magic, Adrian?*)

(*It is, but you'll never have to use this spell again. We need to get her free, she can't die here alone. I'm never going to let anyone die alone again.*)

(*Okay.*)

(Abrumpo)

The dragon clawed her way through bedrock, bursting through tunnels and avoiding the vaults and wards. She worked her way upward, patient and understanding to the crooning praise Adrian gave her- words that Skylar could understand although he didn't know why.

They didn't burst out from the depths, instead they detoured down the path away from the vault. They dug and moved, breaking through busted cobblestone in Knockturn Alley. The light was bright, the dragon's scales were peeling, and Adrian's grin could have melted steel.

"You're free." Adrian assured the dragon, rubbing his hands over the worst flaking of her scales in a reassuring pattern, "*You're free, beautiful."*

Skylar shivered, Lutain coiled tighter.

The dragon turned and looked over its shoulder, blindly staring in his direction. Adrian whispered words to it again, and then it broke through the slate roof and took off into the sky over muggle London.

There were more screams outside, more than those from seeing a dragon. Adrian's smile faltered, his breath pausing into a quiet noise of surprise.

There was something already happening.

The alley was in chaos already, spells firing and ragged ministry workers were shooting spells at people. People that everyone knew, normal store owners fighting against the corruption. After all, when a loaf of bread cost now as much as a lavish robe, of course there would be unjust actions.

"Shit," Skylar cursed under his breath, dropping into a duck next to where Adrian crouched, "there's Ron and Mione, they got caught."

Skylar smelled like smoke and ash, his hands were blackened where they clung to the stone remains of the wall separating them from the alley.

He was right, Ron and Hermione were easy to spot in the confusion.

They were there, back to back taking shelter behind a bookstore. A corner of the stone was already destroyed, a gap into the building was smoldering.

"They didn't stay out of sight." Adrian clarified with a grimace, scanning up and down the street. "This isn't a raid."

"Not recognize anyone?" Skylar asked, helping Lutain get adjusted into a more convenient position.

Adrian shot him a glance, something small that lingered unsure, "...no, not really. I mean, I think these are snatchers, but- *shit."*

Adrian yanked Skylar down, forcing him to stay low as a spell soared overhead. They peeked over again, cursing as a swam of new people apparated in.

"Why are my bloody parents here?" Skylar hissed out, looking alarmed and impressed.

Adrian snorted, "and here I thought you were going to try and say something *brotherly."*

"Nah mate," Skylar responded distractedly, "that train has left the station."

Adrian snorted and grinned, ducking again to avoid anyone looking at them. There was a warmth in his chest, a sensation he hadn't thought he'd feel. Something enjoyable with the chaos, a sense of serenity in the pandemonium.

Unfortunately, it couldn't always last.

One of the snatchers got too close. He crossed the threshold of *far* and *near,* and then he was suddenly right in front of them.

He recognized hem, either Adrian's scars or Skylar's smile that echoed on every *Undesirable No. 1* there was.

The man gasped, pointing his wand at them even though they were practically within grabbing distance. It was an instinct, although simply grabbing them would be more effective. He was scruffy looking, wild and poor.

In that moment, this stranger, this *snatcher,* was a threat.

Skylar didn't even think- his mind buzzed, he reacted. *"Lutain! Bite him!"*

Lutain struck without pause, running on pure instinct. He responded to the wrong Master.

Adrian didn't expect it- he didn't expect Skylar's gut reaction to command *his familiar.* He didn't expect Lutain lunging out, sinking fangs into the man's exposed neck and shoulder, he didn't expect the man to scream in surprise and fear.

Adrian didn't expect the hissing words that were clearly legible to him, yet not from his lips.

Adrian wheeled back, dropping to the ground in outright alarm and horror. Skylar panted, eyes slowly widening when he realized what had happened. The blood began to pool from the deep gashes, it was likely that Lutain had hit something major- the blood was thick and dark. Almost black.

The man was gurgling thrashing on the ground in terror. Lutain writhed, keeping his strong grip before recoiling and striking again, tearing out the man's throat.

"I-" Skylar choked, looking at his hands and then the ground and Lutain and there was *so much* blood.

Adrian ignored that- it wasn't important to him.

Skylar *was.*

"How did you do that?" Adrian asked, a whisper that was partially fascinated partially terrified. "I-you-..."

"No, wait," Skylar reached out, tearing his eyes away from the grisly scene.

Adrian took an unconscious step back, looking as if he had been struck. "Adrian I didn't-"

"You're a parselmouth?" Adrian repeated in stunned confusion.

"No! I-"

"You're a parselmouth," Adrian deadpanned, sounding resigned and confused. "That...that explains…"

"No! Listen to me!" Skylar shouted desperately, reaching out again.

Adrian angled his face away, looking as if Skylar had done something unspeakable. He looked resigned, tired, and Skylar was suddenly very afraid of what he would do.

Skylar was very afraid, that the next time he'd see pale skin would be in a casket.

Adrian twisted, his body dropped away. Suddenly a fast thick snake was uncoiling on the floor. Between its eyes a folded red plume rested against it's skull, a bright sail as tall as Skylar's hand.

The snake paused, looking at him with milky yellow eyes. A second passed, each tick of a watch articulated by screams and fire outside their bubble of raw emotions.

Adrian turned away and slithered quickly, dark scales moving over broken slate roofing tiles until it vanished out of sight through the busted doorway.

In his wake, he left a shimmering golden cup and a gem infused locket.

Chapter End Notes

Link to Antithesis Artwork

Join the Discord Server

Affix

Chapter Summary

> Where Skylar knows the risks and rewards of Lutain, and Adrian flies.

Chapter Notes

> Thanks to the Discord server, enjoy this surprise chapter because I'm furious a show I'm watching doesn't have more episodes released but at least I'm awake and on my laptop right now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Idon't I dont what did youdoto me CrOUch.'

Ginny's gravestone was something small, modest in where it was placed.

They never found her body, so it was a casket filled with things important to her. Childhood dolls, toys, books and a toy wand she always played with when young.

The days were colder, almost all the leaves had fallen from the trees. Her tombstone was barren, the shriveled remains of a few flowers that had been placed there long ago.

"Hey Ginny." Skylar began, voice hoarse and quiet. The wind blew, some of the empty branches from the nearby trees bent ominously.

Hello, Ginny. Lutain echoed, coiled around Skylar's shoulder.

"I'm sorry we couldn't save you," Skylar repeated quietly, reaching out to run his fingers along the rough stone. "Although I don't think I could have. The basilisk is...I'll take her down for you."

Let me? Lutain asked, tongue flickering against Skylar's ear.

Skylar wouldn't pretend to understand what was happening, or how it did. He wouldn't say that it didn't scare him, but he wouldn't say that he didn't deserve it either.

Skylar nodded slightly and closed his eyes, reaching up with one hand to trace along Lutain's scales. Skylar breathed out, and let his mind wander in a way he realized now- was not his own.

"I'm sorry," Skylar spoke out loud, words feeling strange in his mouth, like they were slurred around the edges. "I didn't want to leave you there."

A pause, a sense of fragmentation around thoughts themselves. Memories flickered, a sense of screaming, of desperation and hysteria. Moments of panic, of loss, or sheer *hatred* directed at self. Looking at the grave of Ginny Weasley, everything else seemed so different.

"I'm sorry I let you starve to death." Skylar whispered wrongly, tingling and tainted, sparking on the edges. "I'm sorry I left you there to die."

The nights they spent screaming over what he had done.

The monster he was to treat her so.

The scrapes on Adalonda's shed skin, the ravenous madness of starvation.

The bright red of her hair, scattered around the scattered bones of her skeleton.

"I'm going to free you, of your curse." Skylar spoke without thought, with a mind foreign to him. "I'm going to end the thestrals."

'What?'

The confusion of the statement snapped Skylar back to clarity. It was a slow process, a moment of thought that took a while to manifest fully. Lutain twitched in response, receding with a similar level of confusion.

"Thestrals?" Skylar spoke out loud, finally in a voice his own, "I- Lutain what does he mean?"

It was without a doubt, Adrian's thoughts. A concept or idea that didn't make sense, which didn't match what they knew. The thoughts they shared together, the haunted memories that Skylar had snippets of in the middle of the night.

I don't know, Lutain offered, staring at the grave with just as much hopelessness as Skylar felt, *I don't know what Master means.*

The tent they made rattled in the breeze, edges buckling in the wind. Despite the heating charms, it was chilly inside. Hermione had a sweater wrapped around her, up to her nose which was red in the cold.

Skylar slipped inside, Ron glancing up from where he was seated at the table, chasing food around in a ceramic bowl.

"Sky!" Hermione hushed out quickly, "there you are!"

Skylar nodded slightly, slowly making his way over to the table, "how's things going?"

Hermione chewed on her lower lip. "The paper's aren't looking good."

Skylar was afraid as much.

Ron huffed ugly into his bowl, sliding the paper across the table where Skylar could glance at the title.

Skylar's heart dropped, his eyes widened in horror.

Albus Dumbledore! Fleeing the Fight?

The paper got worse.

"No." Skylar gaped, scrambling to open the papers, "they tried to arrest Dumbledore? He's the *Headmaster."*

"Doesn't matter anymore. The Ministry evicted him and he ran, they can't find him anymore." Hermione deadpanned coldly with a sniff. "He's likely at Order Headquarters now. Apparently Professor McGonagall has taken over as Headmistress, although they've imposed a new teacher for Transfiguration if things couldn't get worse. Professor Slughorn is still teaching Potions, but with Professor Snape as the Defence teacher I'm not sure how much information the students are getting."

Skylar frowned and looked at the paper, tilting his head in thought, "You think Snape would withhold information?"

"Well, he's a slimy Death Eater isn't he?"' Ron growled out with a pointed scowl.

Skylar blinked and stared at the table, concentrating and relaxing. Lutain twitched slightly around his neck, exhaling with a low hiss.

Flashes of colour, sudden spikes of frustration and agitation.

You're a mediocre student, and if you continue to act in such a way you will be expelled-.

What a disgrace-...

Moments of anger, downright hostility directed at such a petty, cold head of house.
How *unwelcome* he felt, the beady hawkish eyes focused on him in the late nights.

No, past that there was a swell of hate, a satisfaction out of being vindictive.

Yes my lord…

Bowing at his feet, the grudging respect and horror in his eyes.

No, more than that. The sick sense of impending death, the sheen of outright sweat on his waxy skin and greasy hair.

Lutain hissed sharply, tensing, and Skylar knew it and Lutain knew it and *Adrian remembered…*

"How many times did you look at me, and decide to turn a blind eye as your students beat me and cursed me under your watch? Well, now you're going to look me in the eyes, professor, and you're going to beg me to let you live."

He could remember it, the way Snape trembled under his eyes. The hundreds of heartbeats in the room. The delighted, expectant thrum of his father behind him.

The sense of power, the grudging acknowledgement that of everyone in that room would sleep easier the moment he died. The moment the feral dog of Lord Voldemort was taken outside and had its throat slit.

"You're going to leave here, and you're never going to return. You're going to run to Dumbledore and his Order and you're going to vomit up everything that you've seen, because that's all you ever do. You're going to tell them all of this, how Harry Potter spared you because living with the knowledge that you helped make me, will haunt you until you die."

Snape inhaled sharply and Skylar withdrew his wand, lowering himself in a squat until he was close to Snape's face, eyes still not breaking contact.

Skylar shrugged and glanced away, feeling sick to his heart but knowing despite it all, his father

would be (and was) ecstatic with how things were unveiling.

"I'm surprised you never noticed, in all honesty." Skylar mentioned with a wry smile, "after all, professor. I have my mother's eyes."

Skylar flinched, and with a hoarse inhale he blinked awake to the two grim faces of his friends.

"He won't," Skylar rasped out, coughing twice to fight off the nausea. "Snape's on the run, if he goes back to Voldemort he's going to die."

There was a pause, a moment of hesitation before Ron shifted, "how do you know that, mate?"

A thrum in his heart, an ache in his bones so deep his marrow felt like melting.

"Just a feeling."

The words tasted like ash.

The first reported killing of two muggleborns were in the paper the next day, snuck from a vendor on the corner of the Leaky Cauldron. It wasn't anything new, in fact it should have been so minor it was overlooked and dismissed with the overcast sky of London approaching winter. They were wearing scarves now, thick woolen hats pulled low over their eyes.

The killing was important, because it was the first killing directly linked to someone unassuming. The first murder, from a half-blood not associated with Voldemort to take out those with muggle relations.

"I guess this is it now," Hermione whispered, clutching Ron's arm close as they skimmed through the paper, "the start of the next civil war."

Two muggle-born wizards had died, because they were seen through their windows unloading groceries as the Wizarding World was experiencing the worst economic depression in history.

"I understand it now, why he crashed the economy." Ron mentioned over dinner, illuminated by candlelight and the single cold wooden bench. "It's easy, to find them muggleborns. Its the people that aren't starving now, and the only people who won't fight back."

Hermione's eyes softened, and she didn't say a word back to argue.

The first snow began to fall, peppering the ground gently with white. The ground was frozen, they needed to use small blasting spells to drive the tent stakes down.

The food was lasting them, the stockpile they had managed to gather the summer before they left. They spread themselves thin, working carefully and shopping cheaply in Muggle London before the Galleon to Muggle currency rate completely broke.

Skylar had mentioned quietly, one morning when he stroked Lutain at the table, that if they were truly struggling he could always spell himself and walk into the Muggle world, taking some food where nobody would ever realize what happen.

Hermione looked horrified, Ron looked furious at the world in general. Lutain, who had a body made to adapt to long periods of starvation, was looking a bit thin.

"I can always Imperio them," Skylar shrugged, trying to look more unaffected by his own suggestion than he was.

"Oh Sky." Hermione whispered, and that was that.

November was drawing to a close, and five more Muggle-born murder incidents occurred. The last one ended with fourteen casualties, three of which were students withheld from Hogwarts in fear of the growing war. It was nobody Skylar knew personally.

"When am I going to die, Lutain?" Skylar asked, curled with his knees to his chest. The black snake was coiled around his neck, watching the white world turn bleak.

You know, I've been asked that before. Lutain responded back, less in words and more in concrete thoughts. *Different ways of dying.*

Skylar chuckled slightly to himself, reaching out past the tent to touch the frozen water that fluttered down from above. "I guess so."

Lutain didn't answer, and Skylar sighed to himself quietly.

That was the unspoken agreement between them, a universal code that neither of them were going to bring up.

Ron and Hermione were increasingly concerned and worried, furious with the snake although never quite voiced it to Skylar's face. Skylar knew outright how dangerous Lutain was, and Lutain was blunt enough to tell Skylar to his face what was happening.

A coexistence, a codependency because in the end, they needed each other until their goals came together. The goals of who would live longer, who would be the first to die.

Skylar knew, quite well in fact, that he was going to die. He didn't know how, he didn't know when, but he knew he likely wouldn't survive another year. His lifespan hinged on Adrian Selwyn's lifespan- which was slowly decaying away at a concerning rate.

Skylar almost didn't recognize Adrian once the spell washed away the glamour, and not just in terms of his outfit. The boy looked pale, much paler than he ever assumed. His hands were shaking as if he was an old man. His eyes were glazed, the whites a faint yellow and the backs of his arms translucent to the degree Skylar could trace the path of his veins and arteries with his fingers.

He was thin, emaciated and exhausted. Skylar was tired, tired of the war and what happens to everyone in it.

The prophecy came down to a single fact- Adrian Selwyn was going to kill Voldemort or Voldemort was going to kill Selwyn. There was nothing they could do to change that, there was no way to disguise that fact.

So far, Selwyn was going around collecting Horcruxes none the wiser, they still had two unknown horcruxes they had to find before this was all over, although it was highly speculated that the secret one was the bloody massive snake Voldemort kept, and then a mysterious object within Hogwarts itself. Dumbledore was quite adamant about that fact, which meant that they'd need to get Selwyn to the castle at some point to sniff them out like a bloodhound.

It didn't matter, considering there was a basilisk on the loose Selwyn likely would be heading there

eventually. Voldemort would show up as well, once he learned about what had all been going on. For now, they just needed to wait and tide out winter and hope that Selwyn would return at some point.

Skylar was going to die, this was likely the last winter he would ever see.

"It's pretty, you know?" Skylar asked out loud, rhetoric and quiet in the air. "The snow. It's so weird, that it's natural. If I didn't know better, I'd guess it was magic."

Lutain shifted slightly from where he was laying on Skylar. *I can take you there.*

Skylar smiled simply in light of the vague statement. "You know the address?"'

Lutain sent a confirmation, and a single destination. A picture of birdhouses, of pastel window shutters and an unkempt garden out back.

"I don't know if I should go," Skylar confessed quietly, a hot wash of shame overwhelming him, "I...I *failed* her, you know? I don't…"

You're dying. Lutain countered, tongue flickering in the air. *You won't have anymore chances.*

And that was a simple summary for why they were here at all, why Skylar had curled himself in front of Ginny's gravestone as if in the end it would have mattered.

"I've made a lot of mistakes," Skylar gave a single curt laugh, "do you know what that's like? To have something you'll always regret?"

A flash, something large and hissing, cruel and amused beyond it all. Sharp eyes, vicious words. *Adalonda.*

Yes, I know. Lutain grumbled back, just as loathing and tired as Skylar felt. *Time to say apologies.*

Skylar stilled slightly in thought, "Is that why you made me go to the orphanage?'

They hadn't been close before, but something had changed. Some sort of link had been forged and with that, they were closer than ever. Distinct creatures, but united and linked in a way Skylar couldn't explain.

Yes. Lutain confessed quietly, twisting with a strange sense of guilt. *Master never went back.*

"I imagine he wouldn't want to." Skylar huffed ever so quietly, Lutain twitching in the slightest hint of amusement.

I struck wrong. Lutain confessed guiltily, *ruined many things for a long time.*

Skylar nodded and closed his eyes, slumping backwards the best he could. "I used an unforgivable. And...and that spell Adrian told me...I never want to experience that again."

Soon you wont. Lutain informed him bluntly. *Many places to go still.*

"For me or for you?" Skylar smiled ever so thinly. "There are a few places left for me as well. I guess we could likely go wherever we need to, under the guise of looking for Horcruxes."

Don't tell Master. Lutain soothed with a sense of foreboding. *He'll kill you.*

Skylar smiled thinly, "he already is going to, isn't he?"

Lutain was distinctly amused. The snow was bright in contrast to his black body. *Yes. He'll kill you instantly if he knows what he did. What he's doing.*

Skylar reached out, catching gentle flakes on his palm. "I gathered. You know where Luna's grave is then?"

Yes.

Skylar gave a small nod, "then we'll head there next I guess. I want to...I don't know."

Lutain understood, he understood better than anyone ever would.

Okay. Lutain agreed calmly, twisting before he rested again closer to Skylar's neck. *Need more strength. More information.*

Skylar inhaled with a pinched sound, his ribs twinging in pain at the forced movement in the cold. He was tired, he was going to be much more tired.

"Okay, do it." Skylar agreed, reclining himself backwards the best he could before he closed his eyes and tried to relax as much as he could.

Hermione and Ron found him hours later, shivering from the cold and clearly unconscious. There was blood dripping from the corners of his mouth, thin and crusted. Lutain coiled on top his chest, scales glossy and dark. He was catching snow on his back, the white flakes bright contrast on the dark scales.

"We should be going," Skylar muttered, pulling out an apple before he fiddled with it, trailing fingers over the glossy red skin. "Moving on I mean."

Hermione gaped, looking at the equally baffled Ron.

"Sky! No!" Hermione rushed out worriedly, "I- you were unconscious! You've barely recovered!"

"Not like he ever takes a break." Ron muttered sourly, "I mean, when was the last time you put that bloody snake down?"

Skylar stilled, Lutain twisted in the beginning stirs of fascination. Lutain moved, reminding everyone that he was indeed, a living creature. Lutain unraveled, nearly loosing his grip at one point. Instead, he cursed something in a low mumble, nearly drawing a smile to Skylar's face.

We can be apart. Lutain scathingly bit out, slithering down until he plopped oddly onto the table, rapidly coiling back up on the wooden surface. *Do not rely on each other.*

"Yeah mate, Lutain just likes me."

You're as smart as a pinecone. Lutain chirped out just because he always was quite mean.

"Likes you is a word for it." Ron muttered, reaching out with a spoon to prod the snake. Lutain flinched back with a hiss, tongue flickering wildly.

"What have you been up to?" Skylar asked, peering at the thick book on the table between them.

"Oh!" Hermione flushed, looking down at her hands uncomfortably, "I managed to find the book requirements for Hogwarts, I thought it would be good to stay up to date on our classwork- I don't want to be too far behind our NEWTS!"

"Oh," Skylar repeated numbly, "NEWTS, right."

"Yeah mate, we're on vacation." Ron huffed out a laugh, "not time to be thinking about bloody schoolwork."

Schoolwork.

"Right." Skylar mirrored, staring at the table in dumb shock.

He had completely forgotten about NEWTS.

Has it hit you yet? Lutain asked. The distance made it strained, like it was whispered from a few feet away, but still clearly audible in Skylar's thoughts. *You won't be going back to your school.*

He wasn't going to be going back to school.

"Right," Skylar struggled to smile, "I'm sure you can uh...uh teach yourselves better than Professor Snape."

Ron barked out a laugh, "bloody right, there!"

Hermione scowled, swatting him with her heavy book. Ron barked out something to defend himself, Lutain dutifully returned to Skylar's arm as the weight of the world started to set in fully.

Skylar wasn't going to be getting his NEWTs, he was going to be dying instead.

Where do you want to lay? Lutain asked him in vague curiosity, *In the ground?*

Where did he want his gravesite to be?

Where did he want his family to *mourn him?*

Skylar leant over and puked on the floor.

Hermione and Ron sprang away, Hermione flinching in surprise. It sloshed over the ground, the single apple he managed to eat was now splattered on the canvas bottom. It smelled foul, rancid in the confines.

"Sky!" Hermione shrieked, pausing one second before she tugged him away from the mess. Her fingers yanked free the moment Lutain moved, a permanent reminder of the sake around his neck.

"I'm fine," Skylar choked out, gagging as his mind raced quickly.

He was going to die soon, if not from Voldemort and the Death Eaters, it would be the deal finally coming into due. He wasn't going to be seen again, he was going to die and there was nothing he could do about it.

It was over, and he hadn't ever thought of what he was going to be leaving behind.

He didn't ever think about his grave, or what sort of funeral he wanted. He never considered the shape of his shrine or what cemetery he'd be in.

He always thought it would be Godric's Hollow, or maybe he'd have found a new spot. He never...he never thought about it.

He should have.

You realize it now? Lutain asked him gently, as if he had always known all along. *You should do it too. What Master is doing.*

Skylar almost didn't want to ask, but he knew that in life there were few opportunities to ever play ignorant to those around you.

"What's he doing?" Skylar asked out loud, choking on the words in a desperate hope that maybe they weren't as bad as he feared.

Lutain shifted his body. *He's saying goodbye.*

They arrived at Luna Lovegood's house a week after, crunching snow up to the small wooden gate. It was frozen at first, stiff enough that Ron had to use his body weight to dislodge it open.

The snow wasn't thick, but it was intrusive enough. It hurt their lungs, burning their throats until Skylar felt like he was choking on blood in phantom memories.

He had been to this house, or maybe he hadn't it wasn't something he could ever describe fully.

"You sure this is the right place?" Ron muttered quietly, looking around. The atmosphere was unsettling, quiet and empty in a house far too large.

The front door was locked, so they knocked and tucked themselves close together to stave off the heat.

The man who opened the door was recognizable in memory not his own.

"Oh," Skylar breathed in surprise, "Mr. Lovegood, I uh, I'm sorry we were wondering if we could talk."

The man stared at them, haunted and broken and far too quiet for anyone to be.

"Well, I suppose you may as well come in." Mr. Lovegood muttered, quietly stepping aside to allow them all access, "I don't have much to offer you. The markets are a bit...scarce."

"I'll say." Ron muttered under his breath, Hermione bumping into him pointedly.

"What about heading into Muggle London for food?" Hermione chimed in, causing Mr. Lovegood to stare at her unrelentingly.

"The apparation network is under watch for any muggle locations," he informed them quietly, "likewise with floo. If you're observed with supplies, others tend to...look down on you. It's not safe."

"That's crazy." Ron huffed sourly, crossing his arms with a scowl, "what are they gonna do? *Fine* you? The galleon rate is through the roof!"

Mr. Lovegood's expression didn't change, just as cold and flat as before. "No, people will come in and kill you."

The tension in the room escalated and the silence dragged on.

"That's horrible!" Hermione gasped in shock, "what about the ministry-surely they wouldn't stand for it!"

The ministry was destroyed, instead it was constructed in a mockery of another. Anything to do with Aurors would likely end in their deaths.

Mr. Lovegood knew this, and so did Skylar.

"The ministry is corrupted." Mr. Lovegood finished bluntly, shrugging once before offering tea at the table. It was weaker than normal.

"Can we help you with anything?" Skylar asked instead, cutting off the conversation that likely would end with shouting and outrage on Hermione and Ron's side, "anything?"

"No, I'm doing fine here, thank you." Mr. Lovegood smiled pinched, shifting uncertainty eve as Ron plopped down and drank his tea with a scowl.

"Do you mind If I go look around, just to make sure you're not being watched?" Skylar asked politely, already tugging his invisibility cloak free from where he had stashed it.

"No, it's-" Mr. Lovegood's eyes widened in surprise the moment he spotted the cloak, words stilling in his mouth before he could even say it. He stared at the material, in blatant surprise and shock. "...Go ahead."

Skylar smiled, looking more uncomfortable with the sudden change in permission than anything. "Right, thank you, sir."

Mr. Lovegood gave a single nod, eyes not leaving the cloak.

"Hi Luna," Skylar breathed, sitting down in the snow to gaze at the grave, "It's been a while since I saw you last, I'm sorry I didn't come back since the funeral."

It felt forever ago, lifetimes. The grave was just as he remembered it, still pristine and in excellent condition.

He remembered her casket, wreathed in water lilies and catnip. He never understood the catnip, but it left the air with an herbal tinge.

Skylar remembered the crying, the bawling shrieking of her father, the man who had been so impassive inside. Skylar remembered the numb somber faces of the Hogwarts populace, the way the Ravenclaws stood there in dumb shock as if they had never thought anyone would die.

The funeral was beautiful, gentle music and various creatures. A unicorn was hired to pull the casket down the progression, bored and shining white. It wasn't anything like a wild unicorn, but the intention was all there.

Thestrals had watched from the side, eerily peering at them from the sides of the forest. The large milky eyes made Skylar shiver, even dressed in all black.

"I'm sure you'd be so upset with what's been going on," Skylar whispered quietly, "how chaotic everything's gotten...I think a lot of the stores have closed now, we should probably be in a state of emergency, you know?"

The grave didn't answer. Skylar didn't think it would.

Master's been here. Lutain spoke instead, tongue flicking through the air rapidly before he shrunk back for more warmth. *I can tell.*

Skylar could too, to some degree, a faint tingling or sense of something he should know and forgot. Another sense, a concept he never remembered learning.

"Yeah," Skylar breathed shakily, "I guess that means you've had some recent company, that's wonderful."

It was quiet, solitary around them. All of the birds had migrated, all the grass had died.

"I'm so sorry, Luna." Skylar whispered, hanging his head low. "You told me to take care of Adrian and...and I wasn't able to."

It was quiet, too quiet for someone as unique and loud as Luna.

"Here," Skylar smiled weakly, conjuring flowers although they were rather lopsided in their petals, "I think you'd like them. I just…"

A pause, the flowers were set on her grave near something covered in thin snow. Skylar brushed it aside, a pain through his heart as he recognized them as radishes.

Someone left her radishes, under a stasis charm. They were still red, although wilting in the cold.

"He cared about you, you know." Skylar whispered quietly, "he was so devastated after everything happened. He didn't eat for *so long, Luna…"*

Skylar's bottom lip trembled, he hung his head and tried to ignore how terrible the world was. "I'm so sorry, and I know I'll never make it up to you, but I'm going to kill Voldemort even if some prophecy says I can't, and I'm going to *try* to make up all the pain I've caused you."

The grave didn't answer, because of course, Luna would never speak again.

"Do you know you have a Deathly Hallow?" Mr. Lovegood asked him when he returned. It was obvious where he had been, it didn't take hours to do a small check around the house.

Skylar's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "A hollow?"

Ron spewed out his mouthful of tea, causing Hermione to hurry and banish the fluid from all over the floor. Skylar gracefully ignored his friend, focusing only on Mr. Lovegood.

"Yes." Mr. Lovegood nodded, reaching up to pull free a necklace with a symbol Skylar recognized from the age of Grindelwald, "The three hallow, I believe you have the Invisibility Cloak."

Skylar floundered, shaking his head in surprise, "Erm, okay uh, Mr. Lovegood."

The man frowned, obviously put out by the reaction but he didn't elaborate any further.

"Oh! You should maybe move away from here," Hermione gushed out looking worried, "Your address is known and-"

"And you don't want bloody Selwyn showing up," Ron spat out, looking downright vicious, "that bloke is more likely to murder you than anyone else."

Mr. Lovegood tensed before lowering his head slightly, "...I see."

"It really would be wise to-" Hermione started before the man cut her off with one raised hand.

"I will not abandon my daughter." Mr. Lovegood spoke hoarsely, "If I am attacked then so be it, but I refuse to ever leave the resting place of my wife and daughter ever again."

Something about his face spoke that they had overstayed their welcome.

Mylla moved quickly, streamline through the air as if Adrian was nothing along her back.

Adrian sat on the gaps in front of her wings, between the large scapular blades of her front legs. It wasn't comfortable, but he had re-purposed his Cerestes cloak as a sort of cushion to help him against the protruding spine. The cloak as far too magical to ever get dirty, but there was a small part of him that hoped purely out of spite it would.

The clouds were freezing, piercing through even the strongest warming charms. Adrian had half a mind to cut off his hair, reducing the time it dragged against his neck coldly.

They soared, the bright white of the clouds contrasting below them.

"Where are we going?" Adrian shouted, barely heard over the rush of the wind. His fingers had long since gone numb in the long tangled mane of Mylla's neck.

"You're dying." Mylla responded with a noise clearly audible through the wind. *"We have places to go."*

Adrian didn't argue, instead he leant forward into the sudden dive that Mylla took, forcing them to break through the cloud cover.

The sky was dark, cold and humid with impending snow. The temperature was lower, Adrian shivered and tucked himself closer.

There was something else, intrusive thoughts that weren't his but very obviously were. It had taken him a while to comprehend where they were coming from, to recognize that they were not his normal thinking.

"Hallows?" Adrian blurted in surprise, the word feeling foreign in his mouth. "Deathly Hallows?"

Mylla stuttered, her wings pausing in a movement that sent them jerking through turbulence. She recovered, her ears pinned to her skull and the thin leathery membrane of her wings quivering in the adjustments of the thermals.

"Ah," she spoke, something between grudging resignation and outright discomfort. *"The hallows. I wondered when those would be back, I didn't think so soon."*

Adrian twitched slightly, using his knees to pinch her wide ribs and his shivering fingers to pull on her hair. He didn't know what she was talking about, but then again Mylla seemed to know many things he couldn't even comprehend yet.

Adrian gnashed his teeth, careful not to bite his tongue with the unexpected jarring of flying on her back.

Besides that, there was a sort of beautiful grace to it all. Adrian always did enjoy flying, he found the rush of wind a thrill that wasn't that different than striking at his top speeds. There was a rush, a moment of utter trust between human and creature- the fact he could actually *talk* to what he was riding was irrelevant.

If Adrian had the chance, he would have loved to ride the dragon he freed. Until then, he doubted few things would ever match Mylla in a steep dive.

They turned. Mylla's long wings folding behind her partway until they resembled an oriental fan half spread. The membrane vibrated, a high pitched whistle that hummed around them as the air split in two.

They tilted downwards, until Mylla's skull and neck bowed so low she lowered from Adrian's sight. For a split second, all he could see was the wide open land. The vibrant colour of the shrubs and vegetation, muted in the cold. The bright splurge of purple heather that managed to stand strong in the winter winds. The outcroppings of rock, formed millennia ago that made up the land that was Adrian's *home*.

The forests, the countryside, the towns and sprawling cities that spanned from coast to coast. The sheer cliffs where puffins roosted and selkies swam in the rough waters below.

This was his land, no matter how twisted and cruel and corrupted it was. No matter the fires he set, and the ones he didn't- this was the place he loved.

He was going to miss it.

Chapter End Notes

Link to Antithesis Artwork

Join the Discord Server

Dreams

Chapter Summary

Where the mind is a violent place, Adrian heals, and finally, makes himself anew.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Skylar sighed softly, running his fingers over the smooth small scales. The canvas lining of the tent above them vibrated in the wind, shaking with a high pitched thrum.

The thrumming noise sounded odd, the low noise was...Skylar didn't know. It sounded different than he thought he should. At the same time, he knew it shouldn't sound different at all.

"Lutain," Skylar began quietly, breathing through his nose. It made a high pitched whine, a whistle that sounded odd in the room.

Yes? Lutain asked back, contently sprawling across Skylar's pillow. The snake was odd, something calm and too intelligent.

That was a fact that was already known, something which couldn't be stopped or changed. A sin that Skylar had permitted, a momentary weakness of his mind that allowed such a rotten thing to feed on him.

A gnawing beast rendering him to to nothing more than roadkill.

"How quaint." Skylar muttered, closing his eyes as his nose continued to whistle. The thrumming sounded off.

What is? Lutain asked him curiously, looking over lazily. *Did you think of something for once?*

"No," Skylar huffed back with a small quirk to his mouth, "I want to try something."

Lutain stilled, Skylar ignored it.

"We both know that there's this...*bond* between us." Skylar started at the lull in conversation, "I know it, you know it too."

Lutain twisted, righting himself into an alert mass the size of a watermelon. His bright yellow belly was startling, yet a very familiar sight.

What of it? Lutain countered with a small hesitant bite to his words.

Skylar smiled thinly, "I know that somehow, you're still connected to Adrian. You're his soul piece, right?"

Lutain didn't move, but Skylar could tell he was clearly unsettled.

"I know, that...*sometimes,* I know things." Skylar began breezily, air cold in his mouth and lungs, "things I shouldn't know. Memories that aren't mine, and aren't yours."

They're Masters. Lutain confirmed after a small pause, *I see them too.*

"And they don't worry you?" Skylar wondered, poking the yellow belly with his pinky finger, "I suppose they wouldn't, since they're Adrian's."

They feel right. Lutain dismissed uncomfortably, *They're mine also.*

Skylar tilted his head, shoving his elbows back to rightsize himself into a sitting position. The snake rapidly coiled, moving far enough away the two of them could stare at each other from across the camping cot. Lutain's tongue tasted the air, the canvas ceiling thrummed.

"We could talk to him, before." Skylar stated, less a question and more a curious statement. "You gave me his memories that he made in the moment."

Yes, I did. Lutain agreed, sides flaring as he breathed quickly.

"That was impressive." Skylar began with a small pause, "and the memories I'm getting, are they from you, or from *him?"*

*I...*Lutain trailed off with a sense of growing confusion. *I don't know.*

"Want to find out?"

Lutain was shaken, not used to having the tides turn on him so unexpectedly. He was curious too, but in the macabre way people wondered what colour their liver was.

I don't think that's a good idea. Lutain finally spoke, slowly and with obvious dread. *Master is not someone to trespass.*

"It's not trespassing if it's you," Skylar instantly responded with a small frown, "you're his familiar, you're his soul. You can't trespass on something that you *are."*

He was right, he was true. Lutain knew that also, Lutain was simply afraid of losing his bargaining chip. His transportation, his promise that Adalonda would pay.

"How about this," Skylar began with a thin smile, "we'll make a deal. You're the conduit between us, right? Obviously you're feeding off of me, so simply...sink in a bit harder. Let me through, and I'll see what I can find."

You can't. Lutain instantaneously blurted. *I can't.*

A flash of fear, of burning paranoia that made his skin crawl. A parasite, a *parasite.* He was dying they were going to die, they were burning apart and the world was so cold.

"Okay." Skylar twitched, a harsh spasm just below his left eye in something that likely looked painful. "Then do what you've done before. Guide me."

I don't know how. Lutain argued, sounding distressed and perplexed all the same.

"I'm sure it will be easy." Skylar breathed, and something inside of his heart told him to lean forward. Something instinctual told him to breath his words, to whisper across in something foreign that wasn't comprehensible but instead, only innate birthright could permit. Something Skylar was never destined to know, and through something perverse he knew it all the same. *"Trust me, Lutain. It's okay, because I trust you."*

Skylar didn't like it, he didn't like the churning heat of guilt and nausea that parseltongue gave him,

the horrifying split of identity into a mess of jumbled concepts he couldn't make sense of. He could go mad with it.

Lutain pulled closer, his eyes suddenly so bright and his stomach so startling against the black contrast of his scales. Lutain's fangs were large, bright in the dim lighting of the canvas and the low hissing thrum from the serpent throat which felt invasive like water.

Invasive like smoke, everywhere at once and never able to be touched. Intangible and sickening and wrong in a way that made Skylar want to scream.

He could go mad like this.

'He could go mad like this.'

Lutain was gone, the world and existence and *am I real? Is this real?*

The world was a swirl of sounds and noises and a blower the bloomed into something hideous. A spider-lily, long legs dripping tar that choked Skylar until his lungs turned to gills and he breathed smoke.

It hurt and it didn't, his skin felt wrong and stretched like canvas set out to dry. His eyes spotted flashes, an aurora borealis in the sky around him that slowly was consumed by spilled ink.

His head thrummed, sour and pulsating like a wound. Feral, wild and savage and so very sad.

It was a quiet place, somewhere sad in the bones of what it was. A structure made on the foundations of something lost, a ruin aging past the point of preservation.

There was something else, a flower closed tightly and tainted black. Fringed with red, gore from something unseen but evidently *aching.*

It scared Skylar, more than this surreal dreamscape did. It felt wrong, worse than Skylar felt walking in this undefined place. It looked...Skylar didn't know. It looked horrid, like a thorn that punctured through flesh and Skylar was looking at it from the inside.

Something different, something new.

The world twisted, a single heartbeat that thrummed through everything before it split apart like a soap bubble, and then it *popped.*

Skylar grimaced, mouth open in wordless surprise over the sudden rupture of something he hadn't realized. The relief sprang immediately after, like poking a blister with an especially sharp quill.

Skylar panted, breaths heavy although there was no relief. His lungs maybe were gills now, changed through something too irrational to ever be magic. Everything felt underwater, and chilled like a breeze.

"Hello," Someone spoke, voice echoing clearly but with a thousand whispers from every direction, "I'd stay away from that."

Skylar spun around, the world dizzying and tilting in whiplash. It settled, condensed in the fog that gave tangibility to Skylar's shoes.

Adrian was standing there, looking at him with eyes wide and glowing. They were dangerous, bright and observant where his skin was pale and flaking, rotting on the surface.

"What?" Skylar croaked, hands twitching as the whispers echoed his word.

Adrian tilted his head, unblinking. The golden band around his pupil was gone, vanished without a trace.

"Oh my-" Skylar inhaled sharply, awe striking his face firmly enough he could ignore the whispers that called out to him. "What- your *face!"*

Face, face, face, they whispered, all strikingly in Adrian's own croon.

Adrian blinked slowly, like the eyes of a curious animal. One hand rose- untouched and unblemished, to trace along his cheek. Another wide eyed blink, another pause for the whispers to stir around them like inquisitive shadows.

"What's wrong with it?" Adrian asked again, the ground tilting jarringly through the strongest sense of vertigo. Everything warped, distorting and sending Skylar to the ground- Adrian remained standing as if gravity had never altered to him. "There's nothing wrong with it."

There wasn't anything wrong with it at all.

Skylar struggled upwards, recovering the best he could given the disorienting haze.

Everything smelled strange too, floral and wild in a forest way. The rank odor of rotting leaf litter, the sharp pungent fragrance of broken pine needles. An overwhelming sharp spike, of catnip and lavender that didn't belong at all.

"How did you get here?" Adrian asked, walking over the distance and drawing ever closer. He made no noise as he moved, no clicking of those boots everyone knew him for. "I didn't think anyone could."

Could, could, could…

"Well..." Adrian spoke again, the whispers cutting off so suddenly the absolute silence was absolutely *staggering.* "Except…"

No whispers accompanied it, Skylar felt cold all the way down his spine. A sense of impending dread, a sense of outright hostility.

The flower bud behind him, dripping gore and black slime, seemed much more terrifying.

Green eyes slid back to Skylar, a pattering of impressions too quick to comprehend flickered past. The fog rolled back, the white noise returning in a comforting hum.

"I- I'm here." Skylar forced himself upwards, legs wobbly against the misleading signals his eyes gave him, "I- because Lutain-"

"Lutain?" Adrian cut him off sharply, face seeming to lose some of its curiosity and instead it looked more bothered. "Lutain? I- He's not-,"

Not here, not anywhere. Gone away, betrayed, broken and gone and how could he go? He deserved this, Lutain gets better, I HATEYOUSKYLAR-

"Shite!" Skylar hissed out, keeling over until his forehead pressed against his knees. The shrieking cut off, back to a gentle whispering croon.

"What are you doing here?" Adrian asked gently, sweetly and as sadly as everything in here felt.

"Haven't you taken enough from me?"

It stirred up again, the crackling haze of confusion. Adrian smiled, a small expression that was almost shy.

Then it twisted, wider and wider until it was almost as large as Adrian's entire skull. Wider and wider, bright green eyes growing larger until something shapeless and massive bowed its head. A crest as large as a broomstick rising high in the air, a sail as red as an ancient crown.

"You've taken so much from me!" Adrian spoke, voice still perfectly heard without the unique ascent of parseltongue. Its (for that was all Adrian was now) mouth opened, rows and rows of teeth revealing itself until the gaping hole of its mouth was bottomless and serrated like a cactus inside out.

All the way down, bottomless and spiked with large green eyes that wanted to *devour.*

"No no no," Skylar scrambled backwards, ankles and wrists sinking into the ground which now was as squishy as plum pudding. "No no! Adrian *no!"*

Adrian advanced, moving with a series of scales that never affected his body. An illusion, like the Gaussian blur that Skylar saw when he flew past the quidditch stands on his broom. *"Oh Adrian, yes."*

Advancing slowly, eyes penetrating like lanterns. Skylar wanted to scream, the whispering choir rose in volume until his heartbeat pulsed in his ears.

"I want you to die." Adrian very clearly said, despite the endless gaping void of his mouth. *"I want you to suffer, Skylar. Because this isn't fair- this isn't bloody fair!"*

Skylar foundered, and then suddenly Adrian's voice was *screaming* from all around him. The whispers now shrieking in agony and pain and outright devastation.

"Why does this happen to me!" He howled, something wet sucking at Skylar's arms.

Skylar looked down, pulling his ankles and legs free from what he realized- with a pang of outright devastation, was a sea of viscera and ravaged bodies. Recognizable, yet different in mutilation. Skylar wasn't sure he'd ever recognize them on the street, not with their nose and eyes intact. *"Why is my life such a goddamn tragedy!"*

It smelled putrid, like bile and pus and that overwhelming fresh spike of catnip.

"It isn't fair!" Adrian *wailed, "Why can't I just die!"*

"I- Adrian!" Skylar shouted, trying to not vomit himself, "Adrian listen to me!"

"Everyone only listens to you!" The great monstrosity moaned, an impression of thrashing it never moved itself. *"That's the problem! You're so bloody-"*

"Adrian!"

"I hate you!"

"Adrian please-!"

"You're so bloody selfish!"

Skylar forced himself to swallow. "Adrian *please!* I- I'm here! I'm actually here!"

"Nobody is ever here," Adrian seemed to sob, teeth moving like a saw blade and eyes never blinking, *"everyone dies, everyone leaves me."*

"No, I mean-" Skylar made his hand into a fist, trying to summon that blasted Gryffindor courage to scream into the face of something that shouldn't exist, "I'm *actually here!* I don't- Lutain did this! I'm here right now!"

"No no no everyone always leaves. That's not possible, how could that ever be? How could you ever not leave me-"

Skylar bit back his frustration, "Well I'm not bloody Selwyn! I don't know everything!"

A pause, everything hung suspended, like jello.

Then it crashed downwards like a nullified levitation charm. The beast melted, Adrian walked out from its acidic remains to look at him with outright suspicion and bafflement. "I would never say that." Adrian confessed in a quiet hushed noise. His eyebrows scrunched in confusion, "I- I don't know-"

"What?" Skylar scrambled upwards, the ground clear and pristine if not fogged over. No guts, no gore. No whispers to stir his madness. "I- what are you on about? You're like, one of the smartest people I know."

Adrian's eyebrows rose and his jaw dropped in stunned silence.

"Yeah mate," Skylar breathed with a grin, feeling very off guard but catching on quickly enough. "You're a genius, and like, so helpful."

A small wind, stirring leaves that never existed. They danced together, two oak leaves twirling in the gust before blowing out of sight. There was a strange smell, a pang of slimy iron. The smell of fresh meat, struck by preservation charms.

"What?" Adrian whispered in confusion, "I- I don't-...I'm useless."

"No, no way." Skylar protested instantly, "mate, you may be one big pain in my arse but you are *never* useless."

The fog shattered, like glass, and then it was clear. Unblemished, unmarked. A large, white room with a slimy flower pod impaled in the back corner.

The yellow sunk into Adrian's eyes, the scars snaking across his face before they flashed and melted into his skin. Ropes of metal, red hot that burned flesh slowly and agonizingly, seconds at a time until Adrian blinked once and he was just as Skylar saw him last. Emaciated, sickly, quiet and tortured.

"Skylar?"

There was something different with it now, a sense of stability that hadn't been present earlier. The room made sense, it was cold and empty, but it made sense.

Skylar thumped backwards, relief overpowering him so strongy that he needed a moment to compose himself.

"Skylar," Adrian said again, more resigned then anything, "great, even my subconscious is manifesting you. For Merlin's sake, can't I get a break?"

Skylar gave a single burst of laughter, more hysterical over the situation than anything. "*You* need a break? Shite man, I thought you were going to bloody eat me!"

Adrian's face blanked, entirely emotionless. It wasn't an attempt to mask his expression, rather, Skylar's statement was so outlandish Adrian couldn't fathom an appropriate reaction even on a fundamental level.

"Okay so," Adrian ran one hand through his hair, messing it much more than he would have in reality, "apparently I'm getting *creative* now."

"Oi," Skylar scowled, flushed from the adrenaline that still coursed through his body, "you were the one that turned into a- a bloody *thing* and tried to eat me!"

Adrian opened his mouth, then closed it with a snap. "I genuinely have *no idea* what you're talking about, and I'm still fairly sure that you're just a figment of my imagination-"

"I'm *real!"*

"Oh Merlin, I've finally snapped."

Skylar stumbled upwards, legs feeling like jelly as he approached closer, reaching out one shaky hand to grab onto Adrian's arm.

Skylar flinched back, recoiling at the touch on an instinctual level. He made a noise of shock, as if he had touched a hot skillet or grasped a fire poker on the other end. Skylar's hand was dripping black, oily residue that originated from the single spot he touched Adrian.

Adrian, looked downright *horrified.*

"You're real," Adrian breathed, paling so white he likely could challenge snow for who was lighter, "you're *real."*

Skylar nodded, watching the strange oily slime on his hand start to smoke, then start to burn.

Skylar yelped, flailing his arm and sending the goo flying, it left his hand clean, if a bit pink and singed. It must have been some sort of acid, something aggressive.

Adrian looked at the slime leaking from his arm, paying it no attention as it seemed to sink into his flesh again. A moment later, it looked like there was nothing there at all.

"What was that?" Skylar asked shakily, hand still tingling from where it had burned.

"I don't know," Adrian quietly answered, looking very young and very tired, "I'd like to imagine that I couldn't ever come up with something, but I guess it's just my representation for the parasite."

Skylar's gut dropped, and Adrian smiled at him with a twisted expression, "we can think about that later. How did you get past my barriers?"

"Barriers?" Skylar mirrored, throwing his arms around to beckon towards the entire room, "this place is a *deathtrap!"*

Adrian looked at Skylar as if he had said something remarkably stupid. "Well done, boy hero. It's

not like that was my *intent."*

Skylar scowled, huffed, and sat down crossed leg on the floor. A pause, then Adrian awkwardly joined him, folding his legs clumsily like a deer. They sat, ignoring the bright light of the room.

"This is my head," Adrian confessed quietly, "I don't like to come here often. Mostly it's just to…" A pause, then Adrian looked past Skylar, over his shoulder.

Skylar glanced that direction, spotting the weeping flower with a sense of growing dread. "What is that?"

"...You don't want to know." Adrian murmured quietly back, forcing himself to look away to observe something else, "somehow you got past my barriers, which *shouldn't* be possible but you seem to defy the rules of magic so-"

"Lutain got me in," Skylar confessed hurriedly, "I think he's possessing me or something. I got sent here, where you tried to *eat me."*

"It's called *occlumancy,"* Adrian huffed out with a scowl that looked outright nasty, "Although you got past my original barriers so Merlin if I know how. Then again, I don't even know where you *are-* is there a different type of mind magic? Worse than Legilimancy?"

Skylar stumbled over the words before he shook his head quickly, "I- no- *no,* it's like, I'm here through the bond between you and Lutain."

"Oh," Adrian blinked a few times before he tilted his head slightly, "why didn't you say so?"

"I- I *did."* Skylar sighed out tiredly, "why are you taking this so calmly?"

"Lutain's talked to me before." Adrian bluntly added, peering around the blank space of the room, "I don't know how, but I trust him."

A sharp pang speared through Skylar, forcing him to clutch his chest in sudden pain. It *hurt,* a deep aching way that he couldn't determine the source. Heartbreak, sadness that left physical pain behind.

"Why are you so sad about Lutain?" Skylar ground out from between his clenched teeth, the sound was guttural and filled with discomfort.

A moment, and the pain lessened. Adrian's face was blank, if slightly surprised. "Oh, I didn't...I didn't think you'd feel what I felt. I…"

Adrian tilted his head slightly, then Skylar was-.

Screaming, no, screaming required a body which of course he had. But...but he didn't. He was cells, small microbes stuck together by atoms and bonds that were in truth sustained by nothing. He was pieces, glued together and somehow that meant that he was something larger?

Was blue to him, blue to another person? What was the meaning of a word, was happiness that he felt the same sensation of sadness to another but the only difference was how he interpreted it? The learned association of words to meanings that in the end, meant nothing. Everything was relative, nothing was concrete.

Nothing was real, if he were to die, how could he ever prove that this was existence? What if he was something conjured- could he ever know?

What was the difference between life, and death or was he already dead?

Make it stop make it stop (what was stopping, but the cessation of sensation and what was sensation but life itself?)

Makeitstopmakeitstop-

Do you know what it is like, to be unmade?

Skylar came to, screaming.

Adrian opened his eyes, twisting his head to free the tension that had become trapped in his neck.

His head hurt, his chest burning in a strange jagged line. He recognized it, the shape of the slice as if he cut it himself.

Adrian clicked his tongue, swishing for a moment before spitting out a glob of saliva. With the back of his hand, he wiped against his face to get rid of any drool that remained.

The air was cold, sharp. December always caught Adrian off guard, even more so now that almost all his body fat was gone. He was sure that his knees were bruised from where he sat on the ground.

Slowly, he forced himself upright, shrugging his shoulders to try and free them from his stiffened position. He had been hunched for a while.

"Damn," he whispered to himself, throat raw and sore with the bite in the air. His nose was bleeding, faint, but obvious.

With clear resignation, Adrian began the slow trek back towards the house.

He managed inside, abandoning the wood he had gone outside to fetch. The stove had enough in it to keep burning for a few hours still, once his nose stopped bleeding he'd venture out again.

Adrian shucked off the coat he was wearing, thick and warm but it was clearly too large for him.

"I'm back," Adrian said, coughing once into his elbow. He grabbed a cloth that hung near the door, reeking of flower petals and covered in dried blood.

"This thing is disgusting," Adrian mumbled to himself, pressing it to his nose to catch the blood that leaked out. It smelled atrocious, but most of his rags had been conditioned with whatever crazy mixture kept the parasite at bay, neutralizing it so he wasn't quite so dangerous to be around.

He kicked off his shoes, not caring where they fell. The thick rubber soles made a dull thud, bits of snow splattering around to inevitably melt into a puddle. Adrian's feet were bruised, toe joints swollen and damaged that couldn't be corrected anymore. His body at war with itself, gout and arthritis and everything else fighting within his joints.

Adrian fumbled around, hanging the coat on the hook and shuffling further into the house.

"I'm back," Adrian repeated himself, hearing nothing echo towards him. Adrian didn't feel disappointed, he instead made his way to the small couch and grabbed the old quilt that hung on the back. He wrapped it around his shoulders, nestling into the itchy fabric with a sigh. The room was cold, but there wasn't much he could do about that.

A door closed down the short hallway, loud enough that Adrian peered over the back of the couch. Tonks appeared, her hair brushing her shoulders and a dark black. It took effort to keep the transformation permanent, with how stressed she was it was a miracle at all she could keep some of her facial features different.

Moments like that, when her face was tired and unguarded, she looked eerily like someone else that Adrian remembered sharply. The twisted grin, the high pitched cackling laughter. Bellatrix may be dead, but something of her hair and bone structure had clearly been passed through lineage.

"Hey," Adrian nodded over the back of the couch, his face blank. Tonks glanced up, running one hand through her hair before she sighed dramatically. Her shoulders heaved, she looked sore.

"Hey yourself." She quipped back, a small smile that didn't quite reach her eyes, "you bring back the wood?"

Adrian shook his head slightly, "something came up. I'll get it in a while. Nosebleed."

Tonks waddled her way over, plopping down on the couch next to him, arching her back in a desperate attempt to find relief. "Merlin, my back is *killing me."*

Adrian's mouth twitched, "oh really? Can't relate."

A pause, then Tonks was snorting behind a hand held to her mouth. Adrian smiled, a grim twist of his face that actually was filled with humor.

"Merlin," Tonks wheezed out, trying to restrain giggles, "I should- I should be scolding you over that. What have I said about morbid humour in the house!"

Adrian rolled his eyes, both of them knew he wouldn't be holding up that end of the bargain.

The house was quiet, the wood stove crackled and cast flickering shadows on the wall.

"I got a vision." Adrian spoke up quietly, fiddling with the edges of his blanket.

Tonks' shoulders curled in slightly. "Ah," her voice was quiet, tired and filled with dread, "a uh, a dark lord kind of vision?"

Adrian curled his hand into a small skeletal fist. "No. More of a...a pain in my side, kind of vision."

Tonks straightened instantly, "*Skylar?* You heard from *Skylar?"*

Adrian huffed out a soundless breath. "That fact you could figure out I meant him so quickly is either impressive or sad."

"Impressive," Tonks teasingly interjected, running one hand through her hair. It was curly and black in her natural form, it hadn't been pink in a while. "What about Skylar? Some sort of…"

Twin thing, hung in the air between them. Adrian didn't mind, he didn't think much of it anymore.

"It's been a while since I saw him last," Adrian admitted quietly, curling up a bit more, "Not since...since I had that dragon incident."

"One day you *are* going to explain the dragon incident."

"Never, *anyways,* I imagine somehow he...I don't know. He's looking for me again I think." Adrian rested the bony end of his chin on one knee. "I should probably go find him."

Tonks sighed, the noise was louder. Her stomach rounded, she likely needed the blanket more than he did.

"You know," Tonks paused before thinking, "come here."

She lifted one arm in invitation, Adrian slid under it until his back rested along her side, her arm falling to wrap around him like a restraint. Soft, warm and despite all the stress of life, her pregnancy was making her glow.

"You know, I remember a long time ago, there was this little boy who liked to shout at us a lot." Tonks started, swaying back and forth, taking Adrian with her. The movements were soothing, the gentle rocking was pleasing to an aesthetic sense and Adrian lost himself in the movements. "I remember a little boy who used to pluck out my damn flowers and left a dozen ruddy apple cores in my yard."

Adrian tried not to smile, Tonks ruffled his hair.

"I'm saying," Tonks' voice lowered into something more serious, "that...that I don't want you to go. Because I don't think you're going to come back to us."

Her grip tightened around him ever so slightly.

"I don't want to lose you too," she whispered sadly, quietly, in a house that was far too large for the figures made of twigs and twine inside.

"I wouldn't, come back." Adrian clarified with something lodged in his throat, "If I come back someone may watch me, they may come for you two."

Tonks huffed, and said nothing.

The silence spoke for them, and suddenly Adrian was desperate to fill it with promises he knew in his heart he could never keep.

"I don't want to go," Adrian trembled ever so slightly, "I *don't,* but…"

"I know," Tonks sighed back, finally releasing him with a jerky movement, "I know I can't stop you. Merlin, even Remus would let you go."

A pause, a whisper in the air. Candle light in the dark.

"How is he?" Adrian whispered, wishing he had Lutain if only to rub his scales, "any better?"

"Slowly," Tonks smiled, distant and shallow, "he was awake a bit longer today. Still tired, but he knew where he was."

It was taxing on them both. A parasite, feeding on both of them until they were to be nothing but shells. Except Adriann would die, and Tonks would have a replacement of his own.

There were times that Adrian forgot how advanced Tonks was, how skilled she was to be an auror at how young she was. She was finishing her last year at Hogwarts when Adrian was just getting started. She was leaving, when he was entering the world wide eyed with ridiculous ambitions. The distance between them was large, it felt even larger now that she had a life of her own to feed.

"Well, now I know how you feel." Tonks teased playfully, slowly making her way to her feet, "I'm *starving!"*

Adrian followed suit, feet quiet over the floor. He would need to head back out soon, to grab more wood for the stove. Life was so simple, so slow for them all.

Tonks began the motions, swishing her wand and hastily forcing knives to chop. She had gotten good at that, she was better with magic than Adrian had eve given her credit for. He couldn't imagine her mentor, Mad Eye, teaching her how to chop a carrot quickly.

They didn't have that much food, they both knew that. They had been eating soups and stews far too often, sometimes partaking in illegally caught wild animals when they managed the time. It was difficult, Tonks the only one between them who could use magic yet Adrian the one able to move around somewhat freely. Mylla stayed, checking in every few days. Sometimes she brought rabbits with her, wet and dripping. Adrian was so ravenous he could eat them raw.

Tonks never asked much about Mylla, although he did see her watch his interactions with her on occasion. From the window, or from the front porch when bundled in blankets. Mylla talked to him sometimes, when the night grew dark so quickly and daylight was as rare as a deer in the woods. She told him stories, answering his questions when she knew them. He liked to imagine that it amused her, the passage of time and Adrian's desperate attempts to know more. Adalonda had been born cruel, time had made Mylla so.

He learned about the stories, the way the thestrals were tied into mythology. Unicorns and princesses, dragons and knights, phoenixes and Merlin, thestrals and the Deathly Hallows.

"The invisibility cloak," Mylla told him while they watched the blizzard roar. It wouldn't be safe to fly for the night, the porch sheltered the worst of the wind from tearing her massive wings. *"Inspired by my wings. Only one of the brothers could see me, he thought that invisibility was something to be cherished."*

"The resurrection stone," Mylla told him a week later, depositing a squirrel that was more fluff than meat to him. *"The brother liked me the most. He knew that we were children, he made it black as my skin and spent decades trying to bring back the dead. Inspired by us, a man obsessed with us. Married into the line, wanting to speak with me even."*

It didn't work, Adrian doubted anything ever would.

"The Elder Wand," Mylla began with something like dry humor, morbid and twisted like Adrian's own. *"Something marvelous. Made with my tail hair, given to the brother who demanded power. Demanded to know secrets."*

Mylla looked different, her entire body changing into something barely constrained. Vengeance, wrath withheld in a body that did not belong to her. A spirit bound to the mortal realm when all it wanted was to run free.

"The wand is made with my tail," Mylla began and suddenly Adrian wanted her to stop talking. *"It is tied to the curse itself. It is powerful, because it does not rely on core. It feeds on the world itself, it sustains through the magic of the world that my curse is woven into. The wand harnesses the magic in everything. Even a muggle could use it."*

Adrian felt numb, and it wasn't from the cold. "Why would you give your tail to make something that dangerous?"

Mylla's eyes should have been glowing yellow.

"I wanted to see what he would do next."

Christmas was something sad, something quiet that they tried to be festive for.

They had the bed moved into the living room. A tree chopped down by Adrian's hands, using a conjured axe that was misshapen but still effective. The tree was small, Adrian's bones and limbs straining with the effort, Tonks managed to levitate it inside once she could see it on the edge of the forest.

The tree was decorated with misshapen baubles, conjured balls that looked deflated and squished. Adrian could have done better, but he didn't bother or else the green would be covered in festive bright red. They could have celebrated Yule, or other wizarding traditions, but in the end they didn't care. There was little to be cheery for, except the fact they were all still alive.

They had a roasted ham, something which was cooked rather well but the smell of fatty meat left Tonks heaving in the loo.

Adrian let the others take from it first, waiting patiently before demolishing the meat from the bone with the ravenous hunger of starvation. He ate and chewed until his teeth ground against marrow. Adrian's teeth were getting a bit loose, he felt a bit more fragile as things continued.

"I don't know what kind of gift to offer," Adrian said as the festivities slowed down, fiddling with conjured paper to hide the way his hands shook. "All of my shite is a bit hard to reach."

Tonks smiled, wearing a thick sweater that had a couple stains on the side. "Don't worry about it!"

Adrian smiled a little, fiddling with the paper until it tore. "I mean, I have some boots that click a lot. I think it would match your ridiculous personality."

Tonks *laughed,* a bright chiming sound that made something in Adrian's heart twist. She looked beautiful, tired, but radiant with a glow. Pregnant on Christmas, wearing a sweater and trousers that had seen better days and hair that should have been washed a few days ago but nobody cared anymore.

"Stop that," Tonks teased back, "Or I'll get a feather and chase you around."

Adrian raised both hands above his head, showing that he was defenseless. A new chuckle broke through the giggle, low and hoarse and weak but strong in how it sounded.

"Settle down," Remus croaked out, prone and feeble with a beard now brushing the bottom of his ears. "Don't go chasing him out."

Tonks pouted, her eyes alight with mirth. "If you run, I get full permission to tackle you."

Adrian smiled back, almost shyly. "Oh no, I'd be crushed under your sheer *bulk."*

A pause.

Tonks shrieked in mock rage, wiggling her fingers at him before throwing a small pillow. "You called me fat!" She teased with a fake huff, her hair lighting up in a festive display of red and green. "You don't get to do that! Or *Adrian* will be *a-drying* my dishes!"

Adrian instantly complained, and Remus smiled tiredly.

"This is supposed to be a festive break," Adrian commented quietly, knees drawn to his chest and his back against the headboard, "This is supposed to be a moment for celebration."

"Celebrating is relative," Remus croaked back with a small smile, "I'm certainly celebrating. You're home for the holidays."

Adrian rolled his face, the apple of his cheek pressing into the hard bone of his kneecap. "I never thought I'd have a home. I thought I'd just keep moving. Fa-...Rowle's house, and then Luna's...then the forest and valleys, and now here." Adrian blinked slowly, innocently in all ways he was not, "I don't think I should have a home."

"Everyone needs a home," Remus countered firmly. "You know that."

"*Home is where the heart is,"* Adrian crooned out quietly, pausing to run his fingers over the sheet, "but Remus, don't you know? I don't have a heart anymore. Maybe I did, but then things went wrong. People died, people starved. And this is my penance, this is my pilgrimage."

"Then where are you going?" Remus asked back.

Adrian tilted his head slightly. "I think you already know."

A bated breath, a single thread over an abyss that they balanced over so carefully. A moment of pause.

"You're right." Remus nodded, looking far too old. Something haunted, something broken in his face. "No dad should ever have to bury his child."

Adrian tilted his head again, a wide eyed fascinated look that was just as unnerving as it was *Adrian.* "You're not my father,"

Remus smiled and reached out with one hand. His muscles atrophied, thin along his body like something fit with skin too large for his body. "No, I'm your *dad."*

A breath, a pause and an exhale.

"Tell me why," Adrian spoke gently, and Remus strained to think against the pain that his life was now.

"You get to choose," Remus smiled, his lips cracking and tearing along the bottom. "A father is someone your born into, but a dad is who you choose. A dad cares for you, a dad knows and understands you. A dad has you always in mind, and a dad will always, *always* put you before himself."

Adrian breathed nearly silently.

"If I were a monster, like my father." Adrian crooned gently. "Would you kill me?"

Remus didn't hesitate. "Never."

Remus didn't get up, he could move only for a short duration of time. The curse wasted his muscles, melting his tendons and forcing him to regrow them all the same. A body far too old, with a skeleton too young to support it.

Remus hurt, his beard was growing out fuller and his hands trembled too uncoordinated to do anything about it. Tonks helped him, whispering and giggling as she did her best. Adrian knew it wasn't enough. Remus knew it wasn't enough. Tonks knew it wasn't enough.

Being pregnant was difficult. Being pregnant while trying to care for an immobile man in the

middle of a famine and a recession and an outright *hunt for their lives,* well.

Adrian pretended he didn't hear it, the shushed crying and the strained whispers. At night, when the two held each other close and tried to pretend things were going to be okay. That the war would end, that they would have enough food to support a new child, that they weren't likely to miscarry.

(The full moons already were grotesque and *wrong,* a wounded animal begging to be shot.)

"If I could, I would give you everything I had." Remus told him one night, Adrian curled against his side like a child in all the ways he never had, "I would give you the rivers, I'd give you the valleys, I'd give you every star in the sky."

"The centaurs would be pretty mad." Adrian sleepily mumbled back, lulled into peace from the shaking hand in his hair.

"I imagine so," Remus chuckled, "but once I explained myself I'm sure they'd be okay with it."

"They wouldn't." Adrian argued for the sake of arguing. The gentle rise and fall of a chest pulling him deeper into a trace.

"Oh they would," Remus countered, "you see, once I explained that I had a child that everyone loved, they would understand. This child wasn't just an ordinary boy, this boy was able to calm the most ferocious monsters. Able to set fire to mountains without a word. So precious and wonderful, that even the moon couldn't resist."

Adrian squirmed halfheartedly, listening absentmindedly.

"And in the end," Remus whispered gently, "the moon loved him more than life itself."

Do you know what it's like to be unmade?

"I think," Adrian whispered into isolating silence, "that it's time to make myself again."

Chapter End Notes

10 Chapters left

Catabolism

Chapter Summary

Where Ron contemplates, Adrian sleeps, and Lutain finally lets go.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to the Discord server to helping me out with ideas.

Only 9 Chapters left!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Skylar apparated with a mind that was partially not his own. A decision that wasn't his, a compulsion with no start and no end. He moved, unable to ever consider his actions, and drew on his magic with the automatic ease of breathing.

Bodies moved, shouting and screaming. They crashed together, clumsy limbs and a flailing snake in the middle of snow.

A forest surrounded them, tall with pines and the occasional chirp of a bird which didn't migrate.

It was eerily still, even more so with the single massive thestral standing in front of them. It was towering, easily the largest creature they had ever seen. It didn't move, standing solemnly in the snow.

"Merlin!" Ron practically screamed, shoving the legs and joints away from him. Ron recovered quickly, skittered on his back away from the mess of limbs from the unexpected apparation. Ron took a moment to point at Skylar who was keeled over, blood dripping from his mouth.
"*Sky!* That's it! That's- that's *bloody it!"*

Hermione scrambled up, jerking herself away. She instantly burst into tears, looking downright terrified. Ron fumed, face flushed and wand pointing at the pseudo-Golden Boy.

"I have had *enough!"* Ron screamed, loud enough that it silenced itself quickly in the cold, "you- you are *off your rocker!* You just- you just *grabbed us* with no planning and just apparated and and what if *You-Know-Who was here! What bloody then!"*

A pause, Skylar wheezed pitifully, whimpering like a pained animal. Hermione shivered, terrified by the new surroundings. Lutain was cold, tired, weakened by the jump.

"Well," a new voice, blunt and bland. As frosty as the snow around them, as sharp as the juniper in the air. "That's a bit cruel."

Two feet hopped down, crunching snow. A coat much too large dragged against the ground, oversized gloves vibrated around rattling fingers.

"Oh put the bloody wand away," Adrian huffed with a scowl, "I'm unarmed, see?"

He spun, doing a small dance. Adrian's hair was longer, greasy. The thestral had hidden him from sight, maybe even let him sit on its back, hidden by its wings.

Skylar forced himself upwards, bright red splattering on the snow like a gruesome Christmas card.

"Not so fun, is it?" Adrian looked on with some sort of twisted sympathy, "don't swallow, it'll turn your stomach."

"Can you *shut the bloody fuck up!"* Ron screamed, pointing his wand with a steady hand.

A pause, a moment.

"Well," Adrian sighed as if Ron's words had pained him more in terms of exasperation, "that's justified."

Ron looked just as furious as before.

The thestral chuffed, tossing its head and Adrian glanced back at it, pausing before nodding ever so slightly. Adrian crammed his fingers in the pocket of his oversized coat. He hung his head slightly, the long bangs shrouding over his face; his unsettling inhuman eyes stared at them from the gaps between the black strands. He fit in with the surroundings, in a strange way; the unnatural stillness and animal quality to his movements.

"We need to get moving, if you want to get back before dark." Adrian explained with a stiff roll of his shoulder, "It gets cold at night."

"We can manage on our own." Hermione clipped out bravely, lip wobbling as she clutched her upper arm to ward off the chill. They didn't know where they were.

"No you can't." Adrian argued with a small furrowing of his eyebrows, "you have no supplies, and you can't apparate back to your things or you'll be tracked. We have to move, it's not safe here anymore."

Skylar wretched and more blood drained from his mouth, Lutain was listless and prone, unconscious around Skylar's neck.

"Sorry about possessing you," Adrian mentioned towards the limp snake and the trembling hero, "I needed you to come here."

Oh, oh that explained it then.

"Why!" Ron shouted, taking a quick step to get in between Skylar and Adrian, ignoring the thestral which towered over all of them. "Why are we expected to go with you! You have given us *nothing* and I am *sick* of being left out of the loop!"

A breath, a pause.

Adrian looked startled, surprised by the outburst. Skylar almost smiled, drooling out a frothy mixture of colours from his lip.

"We- we need more information." Hermione piped up with glassy eyes, "I- I'm not going anywhere with you until you tell us what we need to know!"

Adrian rolled his shoulders again, hands deep in his coat pockets. "Well, look at you, growing a

spine."

Ron's flush faded and instead he glared with an absolutely loathing expression. "And look at you, you're not doing so hot, are you?"

Adrian's smile turned quite forced, his entire face looked pained. "Can we do this later?"

"No!" Ron argued, protesting. Skylar finally recovered his breath, stumbling to his knees. Hermione hurried over, helping him up. She didn't touch Lutain's prone body, instead only helped Skylar to his feet.

Adrian pulled out one of his hands to run over his face exhausted. "Look, I *really* don't want to do this now."

The thestral clicked its fangs together in a terrifying rattle. Adrian didn't look at it, but he twitched at the noise fairly visibly.

"Too bad, we're not going anywhere with you." Ron snapped back, Hermione taking a step backwards and dragging Skylar in the opposite direction.

Adrian spotted the movement, then he sighed and suddenly he looked very tired for his age. He looked mature, wizened, and very very exhausted.

"Look," Adrian sighed, pointing his thumb over his shoulder in the direction he wanted them to go, "hear me out at least. I don't have my wand on me, Merlin this isn't even *my coat.* You have the upper hand, I'll explain everything once we're out of this weather."

The thestral rattled and Adrian's face looked slightly pinched.

"Okay," Skylar croaked, Hermione instantly hushed him, she tried to subtly soothe him.

"No mate." Ron grimaced, shaking his head at Skylar who still looked fairly disoriented. "You can barely stand. You scared the shite out of us, grabbing us and apparating here. Not to mention you got *bloody possessed. I'll* go, and then come back if it's safe."

Adrian scowled but sighed dramatically. "*Fine.* Let's get going, I'm only coming out here once."

Ron huffed and nodded, walking across the snow determinedly. Adrian fumbled slightly as he walked, recovering quickly but the fact he tripped was obvious. The thestral lowered itself slightly, extending its wings backwards into a triangle to show an easy step near its ribs. Adrian grabbed its back, thin hands wrapping around pronounced vertebrae to use as a handhold. Curved ribs worked like a stool, and Adrian clambered on in a practiced, yet fumbling motion.

Ron walked toward it, pausing and staring at the creature unsure. Adrian snorted and smacked the thestral with the back of his hand.

"Her name is Mylla," Adrian introduced with a small thin smile, "she's an arse. Let's go, trust me, you'll keep pace fine."

They began walking, and Ron tried to think he would come back to Hermione and Skylar as soon as he could.

The thestral walked slowly, a pace just a tad bit less than Ron's own normal walking speed. Each of its clawed hooves could have smashed a decently sized plate- the tracks behind it looked like

some sort of prehistoric creature.

Adrian sat in the crook of its bones, resting on vertebrae that obviously weren't comfortable. The thestral didn't seem to care, and considering the fact that as soon as Adrian seated himself he slumped forward slightly and closed his eyes- he seemed rather relaxed on the creatures back.

They walked through the trees, following the footprints that Adrian had used to get to the clearing. There was only one set of footprints, so he had ridden on the back of the creature to get there.

"Where are we going?" Ron asked in the quiet, jolting Adrian awake. The other looked down to see Ron. He had bags under his eyes, purpling and looking horribly bruised on his skin.

"A house," Adrian simply responded, mindlessly twirling the thestrals hair between his fingers. "They're expecting you."

Ron huffed at the silence, Adrian's eyes slipped close again.

Ron liked nothing about this, he didn't like anything. '*They'* could be referring to anyone, anyone at all.

A second passed and then Ron had his wand out and pointed it upwards at Adrian. This close to the other, Ron knew he wouldn't miss. The thestral exhaled loudly, spotting the movement from the corner of its eye.

Ron could do it. He could blast this arse point blank and all that would be left was a corpse. Adrian didn't look that much different from one already. It wouldn't be hard- he said that he was defenseless.

The whole war would be over then, the traitor-boy-who-lived, finally dead.

Ron could finish it all. His moment of fame, a monument to murdering a boy in the middle of winter where his body would never be found. It sounded to Ron, like the perfect mercy in these dark times.

The thestral slowed before coming to a stop. Adrian opened his eyes slowly, almost like a cat. He glanced over, spotting the wand pointed between his eyes. Adrian's face didn't change at all, not a single flicker of emotion through his eyes. Ron knew the other was intelligent enough to know that Ron could kill him.

Ron should kill him.

"So that's it?" Adrian sighed, sounding disappointed and miserable, although that was most likely due to the weather. "Are you going to just...kill me?'

"I should." Ron spat out, trying his best to keep his hand from shaking, "you you...you bloody *monster!"*

Adrian blinked slowly, the thestral made a clicking noise with its teeth. The forest was too quiet.

Ron wanted to kill the boy, but he didn't want to be a murderer.

(How much blood would be on his hands then?)

"You know," Adrian started calmly, although a bit quiet. "You were never this mad after your sister died. You were never this mad even after L-Luna. It makes me wonder, why *now* you're so

determined to kill me. Was it realizing that in this world there isn't a place for you anymore? Was it watching Lutain replace you at Skylar's side? Was it knowing, that you are absolutely *useless* in the greater role of things."

Ron's jaw twitched, and Adrian sighed through his nose rather dramatically.

"Listen," Adrian started, voice a little more harsh but not at all angry, "I've got a lot of things to do right now, I have a lot of things to deal with still. I've got a bloody deal with Skylar that I have to somehow finish, I've got Lutain and his bloody mess. Now I've got to deal with Mylla and her heard, my father, *and* kill fucking Adalonda. If you *try* to curse me, I'm going to bite your throat out because I am *sick of this shite."*

A pause, Adrian's nostrils were flaring in the cold and his pupils had suddenly elongated into something not human. "Are we *clear?"*

Ron should kill him, but in the greater picture of things, this wasn't Ron's job.

Ron was...Ron was *just Ron.* He wasn't in a prophecy or raised for war, he didn't grow up with adults whispering about him. His sister died- and he missed her *every single day,* but in the world there were millions of people with dead sisters. He wasn't anything special, but he was individual.

It wouldn't be right to rob someone of their own life, even someone as monstrous as Adrian Selwyn.

'He's right,' Ron thought to himself sickly, *'I am useless in the big picture. Selwyn has dozens of things to do still.'*

Ron couldn't kill Selwyn, because Skylar thought he had something left to do.

(*Did he really want to be a killer? Did he really want to have something like that on his soul?)*

Ron swallowed thickly, and lowered his wand.

No, Ron couldn't kill Selwyn because it wasn't his place. He wasn't important in the bigger picture, but that didn't mean that his role was something tiny. He was Skylar's friend, his *best mate.* He would watch out for Sky when the boy couldn't watch out for himself. He had to report back to him, to let him know its okay.

"Great, wonderful." Adrian deadpanned, hissing something out in a surprising use of parseltongue. The thestral began walking again- swishing its tail so the long hairs smacked into Ron's face.

Ron eventually ambled along, wand shoved in his sleeve. The thestral kept going and in the distance, a house emerged from between the trees. It was small, easy to overlook. They passed wards, tickling on Ron's skin before the thestral came to a stop near a cleared area.

"I'm back!" Adrian shouted at the house, wincing before he hunkered to cough into his arm, "Weasley, go get the others now that you know this isn't my murder cabin."

Ron could barely think, the house was small and charming and not at all what he was expecting. "You could still murder me here." He fumbled out.

The door swung open, bright warm light spread outside and a new figure stood in the doorway.

"No murdering on my bloody porch!" The unmistakable, and heavily pregnant, Tonks shouted. She had a smile, and an outrageous scarf wrapped around her neck.

"You kill a bloody rabbit on the porch *one time…"* Adrian mumbled to himself, sliding off the thestral before he made his way inside. Tonks smiled, positively beaming.

Ron was relieved beyond words.

By the time the three of them returned to the house, slipping past the wards and the sleeping thestral on the porch, the sun had set and the night was drawing closer. They walked inside, shucking off their coats and boots only to receive three mugs of hot chocolate, steaming and awaiting them.

Tonks was busy doing something, fiddling in the kitchen over something to eat. She had on a sweater, stretched over her stomach. Adrian was on the couch, a patched blanket pulled over his shoulders. There was a rag in his sleep-limp hand, stained with blood both old and new.

He stayed like that for hours, barely moving if not for the intermittent croaking of his breathing. Not a snore, but not quite a moan either. Something stuck in between, as if his body had worn out even in sleep.

Sunset came fast, the cocoa fell empty and Ron and Hermione both slipped away into a bedroom given to them for the designation of their stay. Ron had been strangely quiet, staring and watching but not speaking up as he used to. He seemed to have lost a lot of the fiery personality in the brief walk to the house.

They slipped away, and Skylar found himself in the kitchen and feeling very out of place but better than anywhere else. He couldn't imagine the quiet tension of the bedroom, the accusatory looks.

'You brought us here,' he knew Hermione would be saying with her tear filled eyes, *'there's something wrong with you.'*

Skylar knew that, so he clutched the countertop with white knuckles and hid away like a coward.

"Don't mind him," Tonks nodded towards the couch with a shrug, "tired himself out earlier with fetching wood all morning. Wotcher Sky!"

Skylar managed a smile, although the expression didn't reach his eyes. The light in his eyes had burned out almost half a year ago. Skylar didn't mention that Adrian had been sleeping for hours and looked no closer to waking now than before. He likely would sleep through the night.

"Hey Tonks," Skylar croaked out, voice hoarse. Tonks didn't even glance over at him before she was plucking out an empty glass and filling it with water from the tap. Skylar blinked in surprise, accepting it graciously. It did little to help the soreness of his throat, but the generosity of the action soothed him.

He set the empty glass on the counter, the small click of it drew attention back. Tonks was humming under her breath, gentle and cautious although there was an unrelenting tension to her frame. Maybe it was the pregnancy, maybe something else.

"When are you due?" Skylar croaked out, wincing at the sound.

Tonks glanced over her shoulder, "oh! A few more months, maybe April."

Skylar jerkily nodded. The house was quiet, unsettling.

"Ron and Hermione are up in the guest room," Skylar managed again, shuffling unsure on his feet,

"thank you for taking us in for a while."

Tonks smiled, a small expression that couldn't hide the worried look in her eyes. "Of course, Sky."

A pause, Adrian over on the couch made a gurgled wheeze in his sleep.

Tonks sighed at the sound, not looking over even as it increased slightly in volume. Skylar was itching to head over, to investigate and make sure the sleeping boy was alright.

"Don't worry about that," Tonks dismissed it, although she had been fumbling with cleaning the same spot on the counter for the entire discussion so far, "'he does that sometimes. It's normal, he'll maybe make a few more noises."

Another wet gurgle, Skylar twitched at the noise.

"That sounds aweful." He muttered under his breath, wishing more than anything he still had water in his glass to drink out of how awkward the exchange felt. "Always like that?"

Tonks made a noise that was slightly too high pitched to be the dismissive noise she wanted.

Skylar bit his lip, and stepped forward carefully. "...Tonks…"

Tonks' head fell, hanging forward. She made a noise like a broken laugh, tapering off into a sob. She ran one hand through her black hair, abandoning the counter and instead managing to fist both hands near her scalp.

"Sorry," she tried to apologize, smiling forced before it too cracked into an open mouth sob, "I just- I- *sorry."*

Skylar didn't know what would be okay. He stepped forward, keeping his hands obvious as he very gently wrapped his arms around Tonks' waist. She clung to him, nails digging sharply into the back of her shoulder. Her frame trembled in his arms, her sobs became more high pitched and distressing.

"I- I know It's selfish to put all of this on you," she blubbered apologetic, sounding snotty even muffled in Skylar's shirt, "but- but I'm *so afraid.* You- you don't know what it's *like* here.. I- I'm so afraid i'm going to wake up to this cold house and both of them will have died during the night. There's-." Tonk's breathing hitched into something that sounded horrible to Skylar's ears. "There's always so *much blood.* I'm afraid I'm going to wake up to corpses, and I can't do *anything* about it!"

Skylar tucked his face down into her hair, eyes slipping closed as they held each other.

"I'm so sorry." Skylar managed to rasp out, hoarse and shaky and to that- Tonks just cried harder.

"Alright," Adrian croaked in the morning, when the sunlight thawed the frost on the windows and the watered down coffee and hot chocolate filled the air.

They were seated around the small table, Adrian sharing his couch with an exhausted looking Remus Lupin. Both of them looked sick with eyes red rimmed. "Let's talk, oh brother of mine."

Skylar shifted uncomfortably, the newly awakened Lutain coiled near his throat. Ron and Hermione sat in the other two chairs, Tonks between them and keeping the peace in the room.

"What about?" Ron sniped out, abrupt and harsh and in no way welcome. Better than before, but still furious to anyone listening.

Adrian's mouth flickered into a small smile, "well," he began, pausing to wet his dry cracked lips. "The last time I saw you was a few months ago, and I was cross dressing."

Lutain hissed wordlessly, and Skylar found himself smiling ever so slightly despite himself.

Tonks tried to hold back a small laugh, Remus gave a low throaty rumble of amusement before he leaned back against the pillows again.

"We've been trying to survive." Hermione spoke lowly, flat and sour, fiddling with her fingers. "It's...it's been rough."

Adrian's facial expressions didn't change, but he did nod slightly.

Skylar shrugged wordlessly.

"What about you, Lutain?" Adrian asked the snake, tilting his head slightly as the snake started to hiss. Nobody was able to understand the conversation, although something in the discussion made Adrian frown quickly.

A moment passed then Adrian was blinking in confusion and slight alarm, glancing over at Skylar almost timidly before back at Lutain, "really?"

Lutain hissed something, his bright belly on display. Adrian swallowed noticeably.

A pause, then Adrian scratched the edge of his jaw with his bony fingers. "Okay, well, ah...it seems we have a similar interest at hand."

Skylar glanced over sharply, Ron's eyebrows rose and Hermione's breathing shuttered in surprise.

"You're...well, you're going to head to Hogwarts?" Adrian confirmed, nodding before continuing quietly, "as am I. I need to get in touch with Scamander and...and *Dumbledore,* and figure out what's going on."

"What?" Ron blurted in amazement, "you- you want to talk with *Dumbledore?"*

"I have a basilisk to kill." Adrian snapped out, cheeks flushed as if embarrassed. "And...and I was supposed to bite those things for you, the locket and the cup."

"Yeah," Skylar nodded slowly, still on high alert, "we have them still."

"Great," Adrian sighed quietly, looking so weary it made Hermione want to cry. "So what, do you know how to contact the bloody coot?"

"Only if you do us one more thing!" Hermione blurted with a flush. Adrian tilted his head back and groaned quietly.

Tonks made a small affronted noise; Adrian quickly snapped out an apology that sounded weak to everyone.

"Mione…" Ron warned lowly, looking at her from the corner of her eye. Hermione gnawed on her lip, brows furrowing In determination.

"I want you to stop whatever you're doing to Sky!"

Adrian blinked in bafflement before his composure set in again. His face shifted slightly into outright hostility, mouth opening to argue-.

Remus reached out, gently resting a hand on the boy's shoulder. Adrian instantly snapped his head around, staring wordlessly at the werewolf.

A moment passed, a silent conversation between the two that ended with Adrian lowering his head to tuck it under the man's neck. His black hair contrasted with the poorly kept beard, his body shuddering from where it was sprawled entirely over the older man.

"Okay," Adrian spoke, quiet and somehow heartbreaking to hear. His eyes were half closed, quiet and somehow guilty or anxious, "I don't know what I'm doing though."'

Ron slowly turned to look at Hermione, mouthing a quiet *'what the fuck?'*

"Er…" Hermione blinked quickly, trying to recover from the dramatic and completely unexpected personality jump. "He...he's…"

Skylar shuddered, a large movement that contorted his body for a moment. His elbows clicked on the table, his jaw twitching before he instantly blinked quickly and then smiled crookedly and awkwardly. "No! Guys, honestly I'm fine. Just a little stressed, but really."

Hermione chewed on her lip, even Tonks looked a little worried with the sudden movement.

"Well, that is a bit strange." Adrian confessed in a small drawl, still laying with his cheek disfigured against Remus' shirt.

"I'm *fine!"*

"No you're not, mate." Ron argued with a scowl, "something is *wrong* with you!"

"I'm *fine!"* Skylar bit out, feeling his face flush with his frustration, "I'm just under a lot of stress!"

"No you're acting like *him!"* Ron shouted back, swinging a hand around to point directly at Adrian.

Adrian blinked twice before he could comprehend, then his lips puckered in what could only be described as a pout and he muttered out an offended, *"hey!"*

"You freakin- you stole a dragon-."

"Okay okay," Skylar lifted both his hands before pointing at Adrian, "that was *all him."*

Ron carried on, ignoring him out of spite. "You've been sitting in the rain for *hours* all the time, you start going on and on about absolute nonsense-."

"Poetry, Ron." Hermione sighed exhaustively, "he's seeking his creative expression."

"We're *in a bloody war this is no time for haikus about the sunset!"*

Adrian recoiled and looked a little hurt although he tried his best to disguise it with indifference. "...Sunset between trees-"

"Selwyn, I may come across as a pretty dumb bloke but *I know the killing curse!"*

"Whoa! How convenient!" Adrian gasped in mock surprise, "so do I!"

Tonks felt something like a hysterical giggle bubble out of her mouth.

"Adrian," Remus sighed, calm and gentle. Instantly Adrian relaxed, visibly slouching under the

single hand that ran through his hair. Adrian's eyes fell back into that half closed state, completely lethargic and relaxed.

"...I'm not going to lie, I don't know how I feel about this." Skylar confessed awkwardly, referring to the stunning personality change. Hermione hid her face behind her hands, trying to hide how hopeless she felt with the situation.

"What else is Skylar doing besides Leaky Cauldron open mic?" Adrian muttered without caring much, "learning to play heartfelt toad orchestral arrangements?"

Remus gave a low chuff of a laugh, Adrian smiling widely in such a way it was obvious the insult wasn't genuine.

"No," Ron huffed, crossing his arms sourly and sliding lower in his seat, "he made us visit your bloody orphanage though."

Adrian tensed, then slowly right sided himself. A clock ticked somewhere. Adrian quickly slid off the couch, bare feet wobbling over the flooring until he was standing in front of the table. The humor had faded from his body, leaving him serious and taught. The difference was palpable.

"I-..." Adrian struggled, choking and words becoming silent. He paused, face twitching before trying again, "you...*went* there?"

Hermione looked down guiltily, Ron huffed again. Adrian looked more startled over the situation than anything else.

"I-..." Skylar choked on words in his mouth which felt raw and sour like fermenting fruit, "I needed to see it."

Adrian tilted his head and his eyes narrowed curiously, "...why?"

Skylar swallowed, his skin prickled under the close eye of the other. "I...I don't know. It just...it felt…"

Adrian finally broke eye contact, looking down and watching as his fingers traced the edge of the table, small circles on the edge.

"I thought about going back," Adrian confessed quietly, almost lost in his thoughts, "I remember it. The building was...well. I imagine it's...I imagine it's a skeleton now. It doesn't matter. The Earth will eat us all anyways. The Earth eats our buildings and machines, and all our work, all our effort."

Skylar jolted, tilting his head *just so* before murmuring out words he had whispered in the shadow of the building itself. "Surely the Earth will eat the birds too, when they grow tired of flying."

Adrian stilled carefully, fingers pausing before tapping gently on the table. He didn't meet anyone's eyes, face hidden by his hair.

"'I didn't think I had ever told anyone that," Adrian mused out loud, voice low and quiet but demanding enough attention everyone in the room struggled to breathe. "About that place. I had never seen such chaos before- such...righteous vengeance and intent. Something memorable, really. The fire burned away everything."

Skylar stood up, chair scratching across the floor. Lutain hissed and coiled tighter around his arm, Skylar's head hurt and prickled and he blurted out- "the fire burns because it's something

uncontrollable."

It was beautiful in a way he would never be again. Gorgeous, strong, terrifying. Useful.

Adrian inhaled deeply, the sound made his nose whistle and with a long suffering sigh he exhaled. He looked at Skylar, looking weary and exhausted and above all, almost sorrowful. Hermione couldn't breathe, Ron felt the crippling sadness as the actuality of something being *wrong* was realized. Tonks looked ill, silent and just as overwhelmed as everyone else. Remus closed his eyes without a word.

"Tell me, Skylar." Adrian murmured, fingers twitching and tapping on the tabletop in a frantic dance, "do you know what it's like-..."

"-To be unmade." Skylar finished his sentence with a low whisper, twitching and feeling the spasm move through his back. Skylar gave a shudder, whole body moving in a large shiver. He blinked a few times, trying to shake off the concerning blur on the corners of his vision.

A hand reached his jaw, gently lifting it upwards.

Adrian's hand was cold and thin, fingers long and knobby from where they rested along Skylar's neck. The nail beds were swollen, purpling under the brittle warped claw of his fingertips. It was so soft and gentle, a caress nearly against the fluttering thrum of Skylar's throat and the bone of his jaw.

Skylar looked up, breath hitching as he spotted the close yellow and green eyes- staring at him in something similar to awe. Skylar had never seen anyone with eyes like Adrian's, the thin golden hairs that leaked from his pupil like strands of liquid sunshine.

Skylar then realized, that he had been sitting on the opposite side of the table. Said table, was now covered in Adrian's sprawled body. A glass of hot chocolate had crashed to the floor; both Ron and Hermione looked thoroughly exhausted with today.

"Oh for fucks sake." Ron mumbled, sliding his chair away to storm off. Adrian didn't even glance over his shoulder, ignoring how utterly dramatic throwing himself over a table is.

Adrian forced Skylar's head to tilt, scanning over the planes of his face curiously. Skylar wondered if he was looking for the spiderweb of scars across Adrian's own skin.

"Sky?" Hermione asked, voice a little bit higher in pitch as her discomfort became more apparent.

"That's weird." Adrian murmured under his breath, almost denying the fact that Tonks and Hermione were so close his trousers were practically in their personal space. "You've seen inside my head for real, and now you can't stop it from slipping out."

Skylar winced and tried to pull away. Adrian's hand gripped tighter, the broken tips of his nails pressing into the meat of his face.

Hermione inhaled sharply, hearing the words not meant for her.

"...What?" Hermione asked, breaking the silence. Adrian smiled, something sharp and amused and cautious all the same.

"Skylar here has been up to something horrible, hasn't he?" Adrian muttered, low as if it were only to himself although it was clearly audible to Tonks and Hermione. Remus watched silently from the couch, not interjecting unless needed. Skylar imagined the werewolf wasn't capable of much

now.

"Sky, what...what is he saying?" Hermione blurted out, wringing her fingers worriedly. "Skylar what did you *do?"*

"Adrian," Tonks spoke up. The single word instantly caused Adrian to snap his head around, looking at her inquisitively.

Tonks nodded towards the table, "no sprawling on the table."

A pause, a breathe that smelled like rotting sugar.

Adrian huffed and slowly slid back down, landing on his feet on the other side. He didn't look away from Skylar once. Skylar felt his blood pulse with adrenaline, his mind buzzing with primitive terror.

"Do you want me to explain it?" Adrian asked dryly, cocking his hip to sit on the corner of the table instead, "or do you?"

'No no, Adrian don't-...'

"I-" Skylar scrambled, fumbling to think with all the eyes focused on him.

Lutain hissed something sharply, and Adrian made an absent minded shushing motion, swiping his hand through the air, "not now, Lutain."

"I…" Skylar faded off, throat feeling itchy and dry. "I've...I've been...looking in his head…"

'Do you know what it is like to be unmade?'

"What!" Hermione shrieked, slapping both hands on the table, "Skylar *mind magic is not a joke!"*

Adrian almost smiled, rolling his eyes at how infuriated the girl looked.

"'I didn't have any other-."

"Skylar Potter! Of course you have bloody options-."

Adrian interjected again with a curious tilt of his head, "you said that you were using Lutain somehow."

Hermione paled suddenly, looking on the verge of being sick. Skylar could feel the sweat stick to his skin, the way he felt clammy and nauseous.

"Sky…" Hermione whispered in outright horror, clearly cluing into what was happening.

"What?" Adrian asked, glancing between the two, "oh I see, a secret? Lutain?"

Right, Adrian was a parselmouth. He could speak to the snake- the spy in the group that knew Skylar's heart like it was prime real-estate.

Lutain shifted guiltily, and then started hissing and spitting.

Adrian's expression was a smile, light and amused.

The first thing that changed was his eyes.

They darkened, the bright shine to them faded almost instantly. Then the smile looked forced, before it too started to tilt downwards. The two toned eyes looked at the snake on the table in something disgusted and very very small.

"...Lutain?" Adrian asked again, a name without a question except the tone was everything.

Lutain coiled tighter. Skylar had to swallow to ward off the vomit.

"Okay," Adrian breathed slowly, running one hand through his hair, "then…" Adrian's voice cut off into a small very confused sound, "I- then can't you come back to me?"

Lutain's tail thrashed, and Adrian's face fell further.

Skylar couldn't breathe, the air was cloying and sweet and his ears were buzzing. Everything felt *wrong* and confusing and under that there were layers of outright hate and vengeance. A desire for vindictive pain and hurt that Skylar couldn't fathom but he *knew* needed to be done.

He wanted he wanted he wanted…

He wanted he wanted he wanted-.

"Adalonda." Skylar spoke sharply, spitting out words that weren't his like vomit from his mouth. Heaving breaths that spat sounds he couldn't think of, "she needs to die."

Adrian looked up from Lutain, glancing at Skylar with the starting touches of anger, "I already know that, you twat-."

No no he needed to know-.

"She needs to die." Skylar blurted. His face twitched oddly, neck jerking in a small cracking noise, "she she- I need to *strike her-."*

Adrian took two steps back, nearly tripping over his two feet. A pause, a moment, then Adrian exhaled slowly. He looked at Skylar with something perplexed, an innate fear of not understanding something in front of him. Adrian looked sick, he looked foul and rotting from the inside out until blood dripped from his ears. Adrian was a creature that had been corrupted and ruined and still, still he looked at Skylar as if *he* was the monster.

It was an unsettling realization, to see the eyes of a predator reflected back. A law of the simplest order, that natural predators feasted on the prey.

Skylar didn't- he didn't-.

'Let me,' Skylar's mind whispered, he did.

'Let me,' someone else whispered, and Skylar never resisted.

Skylar shuddered again, spine cracking with the force of his jerking. He dropped his jaw, bones straining near his ears, and made a gurgled noise of frustration and pain. Urgency that was wordless, desperate like a feral mutt.

"Ah," Adrian breathed, eyes finally clearing from confusion. Adrian took a step forward, reaching out with one hand that seemed shaky except it wasn't. He was loyal to him, he knew him and trusted him and if *he* said that it would be okay then maybe maybe in this cruel twisted place of a world…

"Don't worry about that Lutain, I've got that covered." Adrian continued, smiling thin and in a way that was secret except for themselves. A wordless whisper, an assurance that things would be alright. Maybe they would be, maybe they wouldn't be. He couldn't imagine the future, how that wretched *worm* of a basilisk was permitted to thrive and exist.

Everything was so clouded, sluggish and slow. His brain could barely function, weighted down and unresponsive. The chew thing for a bored malevolent force that had all the time in the world and too little insight to care more.

'I see you,' Skylar wanted to say, to coo out teasingly and insult his master because that was what he *did.* It was what *they* did. *'I know you.'*

A pause, a moment that stretched so far there was no start and no end in sight.

"Trust me." Adrian whispered quietly, brokenly with longing so thick it could curdle like heavy cream.

A heart beat, a pause, a clock ticking again and again and again and-.

He did trust him.

Lutain moved, slithering across the table. Scales over wood, scraping further away as if each sharp ridge was a scrape over flesh. The distance growing further, the chill pulling from his bones like a wet cloth from a lake. Peeling skin from burnt red flesh, digging claws into his scalp to remove the flesh from his skull in a single comedic movement.

Out and out and out the string and cloth and *everything* pulled until Skylar felt that he was going to be *wrung dry…*

His ears popped.

The world seemed brighter.

Skylar could breathe again.

(And under it all, he felt wholly and completely, alone.)

Lutain jerked on the table, curling and coiling in a strange pattern that looked quite painful.

"It's okay," Adrian breathed quietly, reaching out to his friend- *his friend*, to lift him gently and cradle him to his heart, *"It's okay Lutain, I'm here."'*

"Adalonda-." Lutain brokenly hissed out, sounding agonized from somewhere far beyond him.

"It's okay, I'm going to kill her." Adrian stroked his back lovingly, trying to soothe the pains of his body, *"you don't need to be on this path for revenge anymore. I'm here, it's okay now."*

Lutain whimpered, curling tight and close and Adrian smiled as something in his heart felt complete again. Something broken, soothed and coated in a balm. Alleviated, clear, and he could relax from some tension he never noticed.

Skylar retched, a strange vomiting noise that made Hermione and Tonks shove themselves away from the table. Nothing came up, but Skylar's body shook and trembled violently. The other boy's eyes rolled around sightless, like Mad Eye Moody's glass orb. They were clouded, unfocused before they rolled up into his skull and his jaw dropped slack. A globule of vomit trailed over his

chin.

"I'm apart now." Lutain confessed quietly, *"we're no longer attached."*

Adrian didn't want to walk closer to the boy, something in him urging him to stay back. It was unsettling, the strange display. Hermione looked close to screaming.

"You were a parasite?" Adrian asked with a fine bite to his words. Lutain slumped in his arms, limp and tired.

"I'm sorry," Lutain apologize, *"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."*

Skylar seized again, hands lifting to claw at his exposed skin. His whole body shook, and he smashed his face down onto the table. Fluid splattered, the sudden sound of cartilage fracturing, snapping everyone into movement.

Adrian took a step backwards, out of the way of the two women. He cradled Lutain close, he vowed to never let him go again.

"Sky!" Hermione screamed. From somewhere else in the house, Ron ran out from around a corner, looking at the sight with horror.

"Stand back," Tonks instructed everyone, sending out a well aimed stunner without hesitation. It was easily to forget about her skill when she was so pregnant. When she moved slowly and timidly, bones and muscles weak and organs bulged and swollen. It must be painful, to fuel a new life in such a crude animal way.

Skylar slumped onto the table. He was unconscious, unaware of the blood that seeped from his broken nose or the raised lines along his flesh. His fingers twitched slightly, not obeying in his blissful silence.

It didn't matter what happened now, not with the question hanging so heavily in the air.

'This is what you do,' something whispered to Adrian, the part of himself he always tried to ignore. *'You kill people.'*

"I doubt I can possess him anymore." Adrian spoke first, looking at the brown haired boy with something guarded. After all, he had somehow done this without knowing. He had somehow influenced, controlled, accessed the boys mind without any cause or reason. Was it the potion that Adalonda gave him? The ritual which sustained Lutain's life and made everything now so much worse?

Adrian didn't remember much of that day, only voices and whispers he knew weren't real. Mania and hysteria he had never felt before the cru-. Before...his father had...*hurt* him.

It was something that scared him, how little he knew about what had been done to him. About what had been done to Lutain. Perhaps if he had time, more years and lifetimes, he could investigate and reversed whatever monstrosity plagued his friend. He couldn't now, not with how the clock was now a permanent reminder instead of its general role to mark the passage of time.

Adrian's mouth felt sour, like he had gone a week without washing. "Lutain's presence is gone too."

"Oh thank Merlin," Ron sighed in relief, "that bloody worm was the worst thing that ever happened to us."

Lutain shrunk lower in Adrian's arms, sheepish and ashamed. His friend knew, how utterly repulsed and drawn he was.

"It looked like a withdrawal." Remus spoke up now, for the first time in a while. Hoarse, quiet, eyes full of memories and horrors nobody wanted to think about. They looked at him, trying not to stare at the beard or the blanket around his waist; they looked at his disability and judged him useless as society had as well.

The world had a rather disgusting habit, of evaluating one's intelligence based on the state of their physical being.

It was something that drove Adrian vicious, the way that someone would dismiss him with pity due to the scars on his skin. The way young children used to stare at him, classmates assumed that his horrid injuries were somehow deserved. Always a victim, and simultaneously, a villain to society. They would brush them aside if they could, the general population would easily pluck out the disfigured and damaged like they were plucking bruised apples from a crate. Did their skin or limbs somehow mean they were worth less? Inherently unequal to someone *lucky* enough to be born untarnished?

(Adrian would have argued until they stabbed him in the streets, except he knew his visage would label him as a madman. How ironic, that he was the most insightful of them all.)

"A magical withdrawal." Remus clarified, ignoring the truth that Adrian knew.

Tonks sighed, using her wand to scratch the base of her neck. "Great. It's not like I can't take care of him too. *Shite!"* she shouted, spinning on her heels to blast a hole in the nearest wall. The noise was alarming, everyone jumped but stayed quiet as Tonks panted in frustration and overwhelming hopelessness of the situation.

"This is unfair!" Tonks screamed, pausing to kick the wall before she hung her head and started crying. The hiccups echoed, the sobbing was disgusting and loud.

Adrian swallowed and looked down at the mess he had made.

"'I'm sorry," Adrian apologized quietly, flexing his toes on the cold flooring. "I...I know that this is…"

He trailed off. Remus didn't say anything, Tonks didn't stop crying. Ron and Hermione were looking at him with an expression impossible to read. Skylar was unconscious, bleeding from his mouth from where he bit his tongue.

Adrian didn't belong here.

"I'll…" Adrian struggled to talk, trying to organize his stuttered thoughts, "I'm...I'll be back I just…"

I need time.

Adrian shuffled to the door, shoving on boots and the giant jacket and he grabbed the scarves already stained with blood.

"Adrian?" Remus asked quietly, knowing and understanding. He could tell, he knew what he needed.

Adrian hung his head, pressing it against the wood of the door.

"Be back in a few days." Remus finished quietly. Adrian almost smiled at the time limit, at the calendar that moved forward and forward against his best wishes to stop it.

"Yeah," Adrian choked out, "I'll see you next year."

Adrian knew where he was flying, he knew the location on a map and in the whispers and things he had inferred. He knew the trees around him like a fake memory he constructed in the middle of the night. He knew the streets and houses from the words of a pathological liar.

He found it, half buried in snow. The stone was rough, many many years old. Exposed to the elements, raw and organic like Adrian himself.

"So," Adrian sighed, using his nails to claw out the ice that stuck to the carved lettering, "this is it."

Harry James Potter.

Beloved son, and brother.

What has been lost to us all, we will see once more.

There were flowers near his grave. Candles that were nothing more than stumps of wax melted into the stone. Memorial lasting over a decade, a monument to a lie.

Mylla curled up in the shade of a yew tree. Adrian grabbed the thick coat and tugged it closer, keeping Lutain close to his heart.

New Year's Eve passed in the cemetery, and Adrian woke to the dawn of a new world. A sunrise through the small cottages of Godric's Hollow. He sat there on his throne, the world unaware it was built with lies.

Adrian wanted to laugh at the sight of the sun, remembering all too sharply Ron Weasley's accusation of sunset haikus.

"It's not a sunset," Adrian spoke into the cold air, glancing around curiously for inspiration. Mylla opened her eyes, looking at him in muted curiosity. He could work with it, with the air and slabs of granite and the wilted flowers from the fall.

A haiku from his lips, already tingling with frostbite.

"Sunrise on headstones. Thestral eats the tall bouquets." Adrian's mouth flickered into a smile when Mylla gave an affronted snort. Adrian's words trailed off as he struggled to think, glancing down at the grave for someone who was never him.

A new year, the start of a fresh beginning.

Adrian knew better.

Adrian breathed out, finding a single way to finish his new year resolution. ""Sunrise on headstones. Thestral eats the tall bouquets." *Around a new grave.*

Chapter End Notes

9 Chapters left

Link to Antithesis Artwork

Join the Discord Server

Abuse

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian has the chance, to say the thousands of words that so few people ever get to.
Where Adrian finds peace, and I hope a part of you does as well.

Chapter Notes

Dedicated to whoever needs it.
And to say Fuck you to those that deserve it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Adrian opened the gate, pausing to run his fingers over the texture of the wood. It was cold, soft and broken from the repeated frost and thaw of spring and winter. The cyclical pattern of the year that rained abuse and froze it solid. Crystalline destruction over the unmentionable passage of time.

The gate creaked, snapping and rattling like the clicking beak of an owl. Ice accumulated in the joints and cracks.It stiffened, wood bowing and warping under the pressure, before the glassy ice broke apart like a frozen shoulder forced into rotation. Bits of cartilage and bone spurns snapping off, grinding into powder.

"You sure?" Lutain asked quietly, his body a snug scarf around Adrian's throat. Adrian hadn't the time to work anymore on using heating charms, he didn't want to choke on the nosebleeds just to keep Lutain warm. He wasn't used to it, both the unconscious charms and the heavy scales of his friend. The snake had been gone for so long, it was almost a foreign weight around his neck, the light strangulation both a threat and a sign of affection.

"No," Adrian confessed, his nose steaming out moist air in the morning. "I'm not sure about this at all."

Lutain nestled closer, his body still fighting the temperature even as he caressed the skin of his chest. The wards of the property washed right over Adrian, feeling thick and strange. Uniquely like sliding his hand into a great bowl of gelatin. Slimy and wet, without an residue on his hand.

"I need to do this though," Adrian confessed quietly, tapping his fingers again and again on the wood of the fence. The wood of the gate, that he still struggled to walk through. "Or It'll haunt me. It's something I should have done a while ago."

The words hung there, as the wind itself held its breath and gently whispered as it brushed against the siding of the house.

"Okay," Adrian breathed out, almost soundless with how breathy his voice was, "let's do this."

Adrian stepped forward, his boots crunching as he walked along a downtrodden path towards the

rickety front porch.

The overhang kept the snow off the deck, the support posts were covered in spiraling ivy and other decorative festivities. Holly hung from a front window, with fake charmed cardinals chirping in a wicker nest. Adrian lifted one hand, pausing as he hesitated to gather his thoughts.

He could still turn around. He could theoretically walk away and climb back on Mylla (and bruise his tailbone further). He could return back to Remus and Tonks and forget that he had ever made a stop to begin with. He could play ignorant, forcing himself to dismiss the overbearing fear and terror he irrationally felt.

(He knew, that if he walked away he would never come back.)

This was his chance, and in the face of death, even he hesitated over something so fickle.

It was a strange thought, a strange sense of fear. Dying was the cessation of life, the ending and beginning of something nobody knew *anything* about. A great mystery, the thoughts and focus of millennia.

But this...Adrian knew everything about this. He knew their eyes and faces, the small quirks and the way they would shout. Facing them here, even with the knowledge of every possibility, was much more terrifying than facing the unknown. More terrifying than dying ever would be.

He had to do this, for a sense of peace and for his sense of vindictiveness. He didn't know if it was targeted at them, or targeted at himself.

Adrian knocked twice. Gently clicking his knuckle joints agaisnt the wood of the door. The glass of the door had been covered with something sparkly gold, another festive ornament Adrian hadn't recognized. It must have taken a while to set up, a moment in this depression to try and bring brightness to daily life. Ignoring others, ignoring the suffering of others.

He heard footsteps inside, frantic and quick paced. Adrian imagined this would be quite a surprise, a wonderful way to start the new year. He should have brought a cake.

The door opened, and before Adrian could choke on his own paranoia and increasing anxiety, he belted out the single sentence he had been mentally and verbally rehearsing for almost an hour now.

"Hi," Adrian stumbled over the greeting like it was the first time he ever heard it, "I have things to say and you're going to let me inside and listen to me."

The words should have been powerful, instead they felt flat and warbled on the wrong inflections and made him sound more like a child than basic talking. He hated how obvious his anxiety was, how his skin prickled and his eyes burned. He sounded vulnerable, trying to speak about things too large for him to understand.

(Adrian *knew this,* he *knew* everything about this.)

James Potter's jaw dropped, open in blatant shock. Adrian shifted on the porch, with palms sweating from inside the oversized coat.

He could smell something spicy from inside the house, warm and homely. It smelled like Diagon Alley in the fall, warm with cinnamon and other spices Adrian couldn't remember. There was something sweet and smooth under it all, vanilla or cream or something Bellatrix never liked. It bothered him, that the Potters were living in such pleasure when the world was turning feral on one

another. It bothered him that they had the gall to live so leisurely, when other people couldn't.

"Let me in," Adrian commanded, voice twisting on the end to sound like a question. He felt like he was standing in shoes too large for him, swathed in a cloak that he swiped from a closet.

James Potter's mouth moved, opening and closing before it snapped shut. A moment, then it passed and James Potter was stumbling over words, drawing his wand with the efficiency of a master dueler.

"The wards-," the man blurted, as he lifted his wand. Adrian took one step backwards, frantically flailing both arms to show he was unarmed. He instantly mourned the loss of his warm pockets.

"I'm unarmed." Adrian rushed out, words slurring together in his haste to talk. His face twitched - likely a small spasm likely from the cold air, "I- you used blood wards."

James' eyes widened in confusion and outright suspicion, "Yeah? And you shouldn't-..."

Adrian could see the moment he realized it, the moment that the ramifications of what Adrian said sunk into him. It was an easy mistake to make, blood adoptions weren't common nor were they that legal. The full complications or the situations around it weren't well known.

Adrian was here now, it was obvious he had been here a while.

James Potter paused, lowering his wand and sliding it into a harness hidden on his forearm. He stepped to the side, propping the door open to let Adrian inside.

Adrian knew it was a trap, that other wards would be in place in the unlikely event intruders penetrated the outer protection. He likely wouldn't be able to enter the house unless invited, so James Potter was allowing him into their home; into the warmth and leisure that they had been hiding in as people were slaughtered over a loaf of bread. The privilege of being rich and famous.

"James? Is it Sk-." Lily's voice cut off sharply as she emerged from a small kitchen, spotting Adrian standing in the foyer with an expression he never thought capable on his face.

"He's fine, by the way." Adrian added in with a low mumble, feeling too uncomfortable to ever consider elevating the volume to something higher, "'ust saw 'im."

Lily's face tightened slightly, Oh?" She asked. Cooly, holding a plate and a drying rag in the other hand. Clearly they had just finished eating something, maybe breakfast with how early it was. Adrian doubted it was something as plain as a dinner roll, or toast.

Adrian gave a jerky nod, more like a bird than it was human. He internally winced, mentally chastising himself for how pathetic his behavior was. Adrian swallowed, resisting the urge to flex his fingers, as his joints throbbed from the transition from the cold outdoors to the warm and cozy interior.

"Lutain is hidden beneath my jacket," Adrian warned quietly, "I just want to tell you that. It's cold outside, so I carried him where it was safer."

Lily's eyes narrowed in suspicion, her face scrunching together as if she could see through Adrian as James took a step back.

Adrian found himself standing in the middle of an incredibly uncomfortable silence.

'Coming here was a mistake.' Adrian desperately thought, feeling almost like crying. *'I should*

have never come here.'

Despite Lily and James not being his parents, there was a way that they made him feel so incredibly small and insignificant.

"I… I just want to talk." Adrian choked out, hating how his words sounded in his ears.

He could imagine them throwing him out right now; chucking him out the door and leaving him in the snow.

It was *ridiculous* to think about that. Deep down, he knew he was stronger, his magic more potent, more deadly. He could burn the house down, tear it from existence itself, without even saying a single word. He could order Lutain to strike them in the time it took them to scream. He could shift form and glare and that would be *it.*

(Somehow, *somehow,* they still had a power over him he could never understand.)

"Okay," Lily spoke first, nodding her head in the direction of a log fireplace - there were two couches there, enough to properly seat them in order to have a conversation.

James didn't move until Adrian did, escorting him like a prisoner on his way to a cell. Adrian tried to ignore it, the way it made his skin feel wrong and his hands twitch, but he was sure that they could tell. He had never had this, this comfort of a small house and doting parents. He didn't know how to act, and they could tell easily.

"Alright," Lily spoke, cautious and threatening under the pretty face. She took a seat on the edge of the cushion, mirroring Adrian's own seating arrangement. James opted to stay standing, hostile and threatening despite his relaxed posture. Adrian knew the man could draw his wand faster than Adrian could ever think.

"...Is this a hostage negotiation?" James asked lowly with his arms crossed, the white lines of his knuckles shone prominently, and his fingernails dug deep into his biceps. "Is that why you're here?"

"Only Skylar ever knew about this house." Lily chimed in, her soothing voice lulling despite the implied threat. "I'm curious how you found it."

Lutain was waking up from his hibernation, becoming more alert as he shifted in the coat, curling closer to where Adrian's heart and lungs shifted with the pulsating of his blood. Adrian slowly began unzipping the massive coat, freeing the snake which clung to his bare chest. James' eyes followed the movement closely, lingering on the dozing snake.

"If you would prefer," Adrian started, relieved that his voice had recovered and was taking on its deeper murmur, "I can ask Lutain to lay over by the fireplace."

Lily's face didn't change, but James gave a jerky nod. Adrian very slowly lowered his hands, gripping the armrest and splaying the other over the seat next to him. He let his eyes stay locked with James Potter, spotting the same shade of brown that Skylar's wide eyes always looked at him with.

"Lutain," Adrian started, trying to not flinch at the way the other two inhaled sharply, *"could you lay by the fireplace? It would be warmer and I want to try and make neutral ground."*

Lutain hesitated, pausing one moment while curled in his shirt.

"Please," Adrian tacked on after a second, keeping his hands still. *"This is important."*

"Okay, Master." Lutain agreed with a small sense of dread. Carefully unraveling before gracelessly plopping over Adrian's knees. The snake recovered, slithering over the fabric and the rug before curling into a lopsided pile near the heat of the flames. The reflection danced over Lutain's small black scales, he truly was gorgeous to look at.

"Okay," Adrian began quietly, inhaling through his nose and exhaling from his mouth. "I want to talk."

"Go ahead then," James jerked his chin, tensing as Adrian pulled his hands back to his lap and fumbled with his fingers.

James and Lily were addressing him as a monster, as a villain. Any day, Adrian would accept that. He could agree under normal circumstances that he was something foul. That he was something and someone to be feared.

But not today. Today Adrian refused to accept those expressions and those faces and he *refused* to succumb to the terror that the two adults gave him.

Adrian whetted his lips with his tongue, and wiggled further back on the couch. His polite well composed posture fell apart, instead he curled with his knees to his chest and a pillow lodged under one elbow. It was a sprawl, defensive and almost fetal.

Adrian had to talk, he had to choke over the words or he would never say anything and he never *would.* He needed to spit it out, to force out all of the bottled hate and fear that had been haunting him.

He was Adrian Selwyn, but the creature of who he was *now* was built on the skeleton of Harry James Potter.

"When I was young," Adrian started, his tongue felt limp and thick and his throat felt swollen. He felt like he had a flu, that he would start gagging on mucus and phlegm. He didn't know if the words were even comprehensible, if he was speaking in a language known to anyone else but him.

He kept talking, because he knew he would never say these words again.

"When I was young," Adrian began again and fumbled with his fingers. "I had...I learned, that Skylar was more important than me. Not like...I *knew* about...that he was the Boy Who Lived...but...but I...I *thought* that Skylar was *worth more than me."*

Lutain was watching him from the mantel, he knew the two adults were watching him also but he didn't dare look up from his fingers or everything he had spent so long to manage would fall apart.

"It shouldn't *be like that*," Adrian spoke, a croaking sound that hurt to hear. "It...It shouldn't be that we...I- like economics. It…"

He knew he wasn't making sense but he *had to keep talking.*

"It- It's…" Adrian was choking. "Only so much time can go into one s-so if you devote resources… on the one you get a better product so-."

"What the bloody hell are you talking about?" James interrupted, looking well and truly baffled by Adrian's stressed ramblings. At least he didn't look ready to snap Adrian's neck.

“Let me talk!” Adrian snapped out, suddenly a much higher volume. Adrian flinched back, alarmed by his own outburst like Lily and James were.

There was a tense pause before Adrian inhaled shakily and forced himself to continue. “I- I *learned,* that... I was worth less than Sky.” Adrian mumbled out between numb lips, “that...that Sky’s importance was greater than mine. And...And as a kid you...you think that how you’re treated means it's who you *are,* and...and because Sky got preferential it made me think that I was *nothing important.”*

The silence was almost tangible.

“...And because of that,” Adrian almost laughed because of how much it hurt, “because you spent all your time on *him,* I thought...I thought that maybe, *maybe* if I did the same, you’d...you’d like me...*more?”*

His voice lifted towards the end, tilting upwards into a question that cracked partway through.

“So I tried,” Adrian whispered and gagged, “I tried *so hard,* and...and I *told you* to leave me or to… to spend more time with him, because *maybe* if I do things which help you help Sky, you’d like me more?” Adrian’s bottom lip was trembling, twitching uncontrollably, “...maybe you’d *love me?”*

Adrian’s hand curled into a fist, and he curled up slightly tighter on the couch. He didn’t dare look over. He couldn’t dare look over.

“I…” Adrian trailed off, trying to stitch the thousands of words and adjectives in his head into something that could convey the hell he suffered. “Families are supposed to be our models for the world. It’s...as a kid you look at your family and that’s how *life is.* And...And if your family tells you with words or actions that you’re an obstacle, or that you're in the way, or you're an afterthought or hopeless or rude or…” Adrian’s lip trembled and his voice was so distorted, “...that you’re *useless*….it has an *effect*…”

“Harry-.” A soft voice interrupted, gentle and heartbroken. He knew it was Lily.

“No!” Adrian snapped, ducking his head lower to glare at his knees. “No you don’t get to say *anything!* You are going to *listen!”*

They didn't talk again, so Adrian kept going. Words moving faster and faster as he fumbled to talk quick enough.

“When I was young,” Adrian continued again, “I...I always felt *guilty,* like, I *knew* I was a waste of space. I *knew* that I was getting in the way and you had to keep working around me because just *existing* was a hassle to Skylar. And...And whenever people came to visit, everyone always said that I should do everything I can to make my brother and my mum and my dad happy because they’re my *family.* And I felt *guilty,* that there would be less food for Sky, or that I had a toy he didn’t, or that...that I was just *around* and I made you all worry when you should be worried over *Skylar.”*

Adrian swallowed and kept going. “And... and I felt bad when I knew things he didn’t. I felt bad when...when I could read faster than him. Or, or that I knew magical creatures he didn’t know. I felt *bad* that I could do anything Sky couldn’t. Because I was...because I was *worthless* and I shouldn’t have *anything* when Skylar inherently needs better.” Adrian’s eyes watered and his hands twitched, “you don’t know what it’s like, to be four years old and convinced that you should just *die already.”*

He could hear the simultaneous quick inhale, the sharp inwards gasp that fueled the fire and made Adrian keep going.

“I didn’t argue,” he continued, voice too similar with a sob, “with going to the Dursleys. Because I thought if I stuck around, I would...I thought if I stuck around I’d be in the way,” there were tears on his face. “I thought that...that I’d somehow mess things up and then Voldemort would show up and I already knew I was useless and in the way so I *left* because I thought that *Skylar needed the attention.”*

“And you know what!” Adrian screamed, turning to finally glare at the two horror struck faces, “I wanted you to argue *so fucking bad,* that I should stay! I wanted to stay! And you *threw me aside like I was fucking trash!”*

The screaming made them jump, it made them tremble.

Adrian wasn’t done.

“The worst thing,” Adrian kept going, “was...the worst thing about child abuse is betrayal. Because you were my *world* and it wasn’t just...it wasn’t some stranger that hurt me. It was the people who were supposed to *love me* and *protect me,* and maybe that’s why everyone always talks about loving and forgiving your family. Because that was your *job* and instead you betrayed me and agreed that I was *worthless* when all I ever wanted in the world was for you to hug me and tell me *I’m not fucking useless!”*

“Master.” Lutain interjected, trying to stop the sudden rant Adrian found himself on.

“No, no you shut up too.” Adrian spat out, pointing one shaky finger at the snake, “do you have any idea what it’s like, in this sort of society, to hate your parents? I could be- I could be beaten, I could be raped or- I’ve had my limbs *torn off,* but their actions are justified and *I’m* the bad one if *I don’t love them.”*

Lutain lowered his head, flinching back. Adrian’s nostrils were flaring.

“Every bloody holiday!” Adrian *howled,* “every bloody holiday everyone talks about going back to see their family! Tips and tricks on how to get along with your old blokes! How to love your drunkard father! How to forgive your offensive cousin! If I had a bloody knut for every time anyone told my *‘oh, your parents mean well,’* I’d be bloody *rich!* So I have to *keep bloody pretending* that my life is wonderful! That my face is just some bloody accident! That *I come from a loving family and I completely love them back!”*

“And that is *not bloody fair!* It’s taken me *my entire life* to figure out that it’s okay to not love your parents! It’s okay to not forgive your parents! It’s okay that I’m a little bit mad my face looks like *a goddamn quilt!* It’s okay that I want to cry or throw up thinking about my family! *I didn’t fucking choose this!”*

“Harry-,” Lily cut in again, voice strained and broken. It didn’t sound like all of the ways Adrian imagined it would sound. It didn’t sound like the millions of times he thought this conversation over in his head.

“Adrian,” James interjected softly, his preferred name was enough that Adrian could swallow and slowly look over, keeping his eyes on the man’s legs instead of their faces.

James moved, very slowly and carefully walking around the couch until he could sit next to his wife. His body language was open, not at all the cautious defensive posture from before. Adrian

didn't know why, but he hated that the most.

"Humans can't help how they feel," James started quietly, voice gentle and ashamed but knowing. "We have very little control over our feelings. Merlin knows I know that, there were times I'd hide away as Prongs just so I could stop *feeling."*

It was always so much easier, being an animal.

Adrian wanted to pretend he had never thought about running away, shifting into his animagus form and living out his life as a predator.

"But humans have complete control over our actions," James continued, voice quiet and struck but strong, "and I can never deny that any of what we did was right. I can *never* deny, that we didn't hurt you."

"You chose that." Adrian sniffled, sounding betrayed so viscerally he could cough blood and it would be fitting, "you *chose,* with your free will, to treat me like shite. And I had no control over how that made me feel."

Lily sniffed and trembled from where she sat, "a-a-" she paused, trying to breathe through the stuttering of her words, "...a-and how did that make you feel?"

Adrian smiled, a weak shaky smile. An expression so heartbroken and tortured that it took the breath away from everyone in the room.

"I've been hit by the cruciatus," Adrian confessed in a near whisper, "I..I know what it's like to be *unmade...*and it hurt. It's painful, and it *hurts.* But every time I think back about that, about what you did to *me*...I'll never forget the feeling of being absolutely alone in the world with no one to love or protect me... And that absolute, deep shame."

Adrian exhaled, the gasping rattling sob could kill someone.

"And I will *never forget it,"* Adrian couldn't help it, "the...I will *never forget* that. The *guilt,* and...and I *know now* that none of it was my fault, that I had nothing to do with it, but It doesn't make it *go away."*

"Adrian-."

"You know," Adrian smiled, in a breathless hysterical sob of something pretending to be happy, "I almost wish you *did* just beat me. That you just...just bashed my skull in. Because all you did was...it was just *words,* right? Words don't *hurt you...right?"*

Lutain moved slightly, the sound of scales over the flooring. The snake didn't approach or move further away. Instead, he tensed and moved out of pure anxiety over the emotions of the discussions.

Adrian hiccuped, fiddling with his fingers. He wanted to claw at his cuticles until they bled, but he knew the risks of that.

"I hate you," Adrian confessed quietly with a small sniffle. "I hate you *so much,* because for years I thought I wasn't good enough. I thought I wasn't smart enough, or powerful enough. And...and because of all of that, I was used like a broken toy and I *knew* I was being used, but I was *okay with that,* because maybe, *maybe* if I get a bit stronger or a bit *better,* then *maybe they'll love me."*

Adrian was trembling again, hands twitching, "I wasted my life, trying to make the Dark Lord love

me."

"Master…"

"...and I did everything so perfectly," Adrian whispered. "I did...I became a monster, because I thought if I was finally better than Sky, then maybe I would be good enough to...to…"

To be loved. To be adored. To be something that people acknowledged. To be a person.

"...I've done terrible things, because they were expected of me." Adrian confessed with a sniff, "I've done *horrible things,* because sometimes, *sometimes,* Bella would smile at me or give me a hug. I killed someone because I wanted someone to praise me. I let my father scar my face and put me through *agony,* because I wanted someone to be proud of me."

Adrian hiccuped, and it hurt his chest so sharply it burned. "I threw my life away, because I wanted to beat Skylar at *one thing,* and you would have to apologize to me about what you did to me...I wanted to see your face, and I wanted to break your heart like you broke mine."

"Adrian-," James whispered, and Adrian shook his head. The world spun in a wave of dizziness, the blood pressure in his head too low to support such sudden movements. Adrian ignored it, forced himself to see through it as he glared.

"No," Adrian argued with a small voice. "I...I *know,* that I wanted to see your face. I wanted to see your eyes horrified and scared because you *deserved it*. I wasted my *life* on that, because I wanted to hear what words you have to say to defend yourself."

Lily swallowed, her eyes were bloodshot and silent tears had turned her skin patchy.

"I don't want that," Adrian whispered quietly, knowing he likely didn't look any better. "I don't want that anymore. It gives you too much power, because it means after all this time I'm *still* willing to kill myself for your acknowledgement. And that means *nothing now.* I don't *care about it* anymore."

Adrian stood sharply, suddenly. He was standing, towering over the two adults in their own house. They weren't his parents, they were his abusers. They were Lily and James Potter, two people who made poor life choices and because of that, Adrian couldn't find it in him to ever refer to them as a title again. They didn't deserve it. They didn't deserve his attempts even now.

"The fact I'm here means nothing. My ability to expose myself to the source of my trauma is *no measure* of how successful my healing is. It means *nothing.* Just because I can handle sitting here doesn't mean I forgive you at all. Showing up here only proves to you that I'm strong enough to take what you throw at me. I'm not going to stay here, because I'm sane enough to handle it. I'm not going to stay here because I'm sick enough to not leave." Adrian wiped one arm under his nose, inhaling sharply as he thought through his last words, "'I hate you two, *so so much.* And it isn't because of some...sense of morality that I'm going to walk out of here. It isn't some 'great plan' of mine. It's out of respect for *Remus,* that I am not going to kill you right now because *we all fucking know you deserve it."*

Lutain perked up, slithering across the floor and up Adrian's arm obediently. Adrian glared, tears tracking down his face and hiccups forcing his chest to move.

"I hate you," Adrian whispered out, "and you have to live knowing that."

Adrian turned, and walked out without another word.

Mylla obviously expected it to take longer, she snapped her head around in instant surprise the moment she heard him walk across the path. Snow crunched, his breath puffed, and Mylla made a low rumbling noise as she shook her head.

Her ears flopped around like a dog before she composed herself, stretching her wings like a ballerina's pirouette. Her jaw gnashed, stretching the joint as old sharpened fangs clicked together gently.

"I thought you would take longer." Mylla commented, stretching her legs before rising into a single lanky creature. The sky was bright now, although he hadn't been gone long.

"Yeah well," Adrian huffed sourly, hunching his shoulders together to ward off the chill. "It wasn't much of a discussion."

Mylla's tail swished. Long and black, the hairs looked tough and poorly treated, it was a marvel that there weren't any mats.

"Good." Mylla confided with a distinctly pleased huff. *"Apologies are rarely deserved."*

Adrian's face twitched. His face felt disgusting, sugary and tight from where his tears had dried. He knew his eyes would be bloodshot, Mylla didn't mention it.

"You saying that I don't deserve an apology?" Adrian scowled, snapping out his words viciously. Mylla walked towards him, sticking to the road to avoid the uneven snow banks that would damage her footing.

"I say that apologies accomplish little." Mylla clarified with the infuriating ancient knowledge she flaunted about. *"It is an oath based on words, but afterwards when words are exchanged the action has still occurred. Why apologies after a wrongdoing, if it will not change the wrongdoing itself?"*

Adrian shrugged his shoulders. "Sometimes it makes us feel better."

Mylla chuffed, her breath white foam in the air. *"Feelings. How...mundane."*

Adrian rolled his eyes, feeling far too sensitive to banter or debate as much as Mylla enjoyed. "Feelings give us abilities. Sometimes we forgive, sometimes we can move on. Acknowledging our feelings gives us opportunities to continue on with our life."

"Feelings are what inhibit you to begin with." Mylla countered with a grumble, clicking her fangs uncomfortably close to Adrian's ears. *"You give too many chances."*

"It's cowardly to attack someone when their back is turned." Adrian muttered, "giving them a...giving them an opportunity allows them-."

"Allows you to be betrayed." Mylla hissed back, sounding aggravated and furious the way she got whenever Adalonda was being implied. *"Betrayal always happens. How about those people you just visited? How many times have they betrayed you?"*

Adrian's jaw floundered, "I- I mean-."

"Once? I heard you." Mylla chattered her teeth, words hissing and spitting from her reptilian throat. *"Twice? From the forest when you were dragged from that corpse screaming and crying?"*

“I-...” Adrian flinched at the mention of Luna, uncomfortable with the knowledge that Mylla *knew* what happened that night.

“Three times?” Mylla pressed with something like glee now, *“they did not chase you to beg for your forgiveness.”*

They hadn’t chased after him when he stormed out, did they?

“It doesn’t matter anymore.” Adrian muttered to her with a sour note, “I’m *done* with them. That’s it.”

“That’s not the point.” Mylla continued to argue angrily, *“you offer too many chances. You shouldn’t do that.”*

“Just because you don’t offer a second chance doesn’t mean I shouldn’t.” Adrian denied sharply. “I’m not an *animal.”*

Mylla chilled, her body tensing into something furious but contained.

“You’ve changed.”

“No,” Adrian’s smirk was all teeth, “I just realized how cruel you really were.”

Mylla landed sharply and with no mercy, nearly sending Adrian flying from her back. Adrian cursed, grabbing the hair of her neck with sweaty palms to stabilize himself.

The moment Mylla landed, the door to the cottage opened. A bushy haired head poked out, details impossible to see over the distance. Despite it, Adrian knew it was Hermione.

“Go.” Mylla seethed, frustrated but knowing she couldn’t be rid of Adrian yet. *“I need to hunt.”*

Adrian clambered down, not looking as Mylla sprinted off and leapt out of sight. She had a bit of a temper.

Lutain stirred back into awareness the moment the heat of the wards washed over them. A stewpot boiling and releasing gentle fumes that only brought the cavernous pit of Adrian’s stomach back into focus. He could have eaten the entire pot, metal and all if he truly desired.

“I’m back.” Adrian grunted, shuckinng off the coat and boots before brushing past Hermione, sliding into the small living room. His couch was occupied with Skylar and Ron, the former looking much healthier. Adrian scowled, snatched the blanket from the redhead’s lap before he curled it around his slight frame. It was *his* blanket as far as he was concerned.

“Oi!” Ron squawked, jumping in alarm at seeing the other so close. “Give that back!”

Adrian bared his teeth and hissed wordlessly in parseltongue. Ron glared, not deterred.

“Let him have it,” Skylar croaked out with a small smile, “he’s always chilly.”

“It’s to counteract your hot-head.” Adrian sniped back with a scowl. Skylar raised his eyebrows, looking distinctly amused by everything.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t hear you.” Skylar blinked in mock surprise, “were you calling *me,* the

hotheaded one?"

"I swear to god if you bring up the-."

"You set *the train on fire."*

Adrian rolled his eyes and didn't respond.

"How was your outing?" Skylar asked curiously, adopting a conversational tone. He blinked slowly, clearly tired but still energetic enough for conversation.

"Oi, we don't want to hear about murder." Ron grumbled under his breath. Skylar subtly kicked him, frowning at the viciousness.

"I didn't kill anyone." Adrian muttered in annoyance.

"Unlike Skylar's active murder on his brain."" Lutain slurred out, coming back into awareness as the heat warmed his body.

Skylar glanced at the snake, eyes lingering before he quickly looked away. "I don't know what he's saying, but I know he probably just called me stupid."

Adrian almost smiled, "pretty much."

Hermione ran around the corner, holding a basket of assorted rolls. The sight caught Adrian off guard, he hadn't seen so much bread in quite a while.

"Here!" Hermione hurried, handing over the massive basket, "Tonks said to give this to you the moment you got back! She's sleeping right now, so is Professor Lupin-."

Adrian grabbed a roll, shoved it in his mouth and gave a grunt not unlike a troll. He curled up further in the patchwork quilt, folding his legs around him in a makeshift blanket nest with the basket in the center.

"I'm gonna be honest," Adrian spoke loudly, already tearing into another roll, "if any of you take my food you're going to lose a finger."

"Bite them regardless." Lutain advised sleepily.

Ron paled and Hermione took a stumbling step backwards.

"I- you can't just *bite people!"* Hermione nearly shrieked, containing her volume at the last minute.

"Unless they consent." Skylar piped up after a small moment.

Adrian didn't hesitate. "Kinky."

Hermione flushed so red, Adrian was sure she was darker than the Gryffindor house colours. Ron looked ready to walk out the door and forget any of them existed.

"I'm sure you know all about that," Skylar smiled back, a small timid expression. His eyes were bright with delight and humour.

"I'm an animagus," Adrian responded without a pause, "I swallow things whol-"

Hermione looked like she wanted to scream. Instead, she grabbed the nearest pillow and chucked it across the room as quickly as she could. Adrian flinched back, smacking the pillow aside before he tore into yet another roll.

“Where *did* you go?” Skylar asked out of curiosity, “you ran out quick.”

Adrian shuffled and tore bread into tiny pieces no bigger than his pinky nail. “How’s the relapse?”

Skylar gave a single shoulder shrug, “It’s fine. I keep thinking that...well. Sometimes I keep thinking I’m places where I’m not.”

Adrian tilted his head partially, eyes locked and inquisitive. He stuffed more bread in his face.

“Just tiny things,” Skylar confessed with a small wince. “Uh...I keep thinking my left arm is on...wrong…”

“Lost that once,” Adrian grunted with a small nod, trying to keep the information as impersonal as possible, “hurted when I was younger. Bella chopped it off.”

Skylar blinked quickly, then glanced down at his hand as if it was something different.

“You had your *arm fall off?”* Ron looked at him in horror. Adrian ignored him.

“My face hurts too.” Skylar mentioned quietly, the atmosphere lowering to a tense pause. Skylar pulled a hand to his own face, tracing along his jaw and over his cheek, an obvious mimicry of the various scars across Adrian’s own skin. “I...I feel like I’m going insane. It..it hurt but it...it was...*nice?”*

Adrian felt like vomiting all he managed to eat.

“Yeah,” Adrian shrugged off as if it didn’t bother him, “I wanted it at the time.”

Sometimes horror and disgust worked to silence conversations better than a charm.

“...My skin itches too, like it’s being pulled.” Skylar spoke quietly, staring at the wall blankly instead of looking at anyone in general.

“...A tattoo.” Adrian tried not to think about it lest he summoned it, “it’s big.”

He could see Hermione mouthing the word silently to herself, too shaken to make words.

“Catnip.” Skylar blurted, the word sharp and crisp. Firm, where everything else hadn’t been. “I smell catnip. All the time. When I look at your snake, or that earring you’ve got now. That big thestral, or that pudding Tonks gave when you were gone.”

Adrian grabbed the last roll, rolling it between his fingers. He didn’t want to answer it, not really, but he knew for some reason he should.

“When someone dies, the first thing you forget is their voice.” Adrian mumbled, tearing the bread out of something to do. Something destructive to hide how much his chest throbbed. “The last thing to go, is the smell.”

A pause, and Skylar inhaled shakily. “Catnip?”

Adrian bit and chewed and it tasted like ash.

“Did you have a fun New Years?” Hermione attempted to change the conversation topic, forced bright and uplifting. Adrian smiled crookedly.

“Sure,” He admitted with a glint to his eye, “spent it on my gravestone. Saw our *good mumsy and dadsy* this morning.”

Skylar choked, Ron instantly flung an arm out to keep Skylar on the couch. Hermione gasped in horror and drew her wand instantly.

Lutain reared, coiling into a sharp S shape with the ready intent to strike. Such loyalty, it was commendable.

“Don’t worry, “Adrian huffed with a frown, “Merlin, I told you I didn’t kill anyone.”

“My mum? Dad?” Skylar looked pale, any colour to his cheeks had fled at the single mention. “You...you didn’t hurt them?”

“I should have.” Adrian confessed quietly, fumbling with the edge of the empty basket. “I screamed at them a bit. Then I left. That was it.”

“That was it my *arse-.”*

“What about?” Skylar demanded, looking frightened and worried, “Adrian *what about?”*

“Why do you think I would do something to them?” Adrian asked instead, quietly and curious with something tired in the shape of his brows. “Just because they abused me, doesn’t mean that I in turn would abuse them.”

“No,” Skylar argued with something desperate in his eyes, “I’m worried because you’re *fucked up,* Adrian.”

Adrian stilled, looked down at his hands. He flexed them, opening and closing them as if somehow that would magic away his problems.

“Yeah,” Adrian sighed wearily, “yeah, I guess that’s justified.”

Skylar swallowed, and looked no less afraid.

“I think, that If I had more time, I’d go to St. Mungos.” Adrian confessed in a low mutter, “find a mind healer. See if there was anything they can do about it.”

‘But you’re dying,’ everyone knew and nobody said. Adrian could have smiled.

“You’re right, I am messed up.” Adrian confirmed, “but I know that now. I didn’t before, but now I know that. I know it’s not right, what happened to me and how I am now. So I went, and I told them that. I told them, that they were cruel and horrible, and I hate them for everything they did.”

Skylar watched him before he nodded slowly, “I don’t hate them, but I...I can’t look at them. Knowing what they did.”

“Then don’t.” Adrian shrugged and curled the blanket tighter around him, “you aren’t under an obligation to see them if you don’t want to.”

“It’s not that *easy!”* Skylar snapped back, sounding scared and hurt and very lost, “I don’t want to ruin our family.”

Adrian tilted his head with something small. “Sky, it took me a while, but I figured out a secret. Screwed up kids can’t ruin families, it’s the screwed up parents that deserve all the blame.”

Chapter End Notes

Link to Antithesis Artwork

Parting

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian doesn't want to go, Skylar has some words, and Vitaedax and Obscuri look the same.

Chapter Notes

Because sometimes saying Goodbye is sour and painful, but never having said goodbye at all is inexplicably always worse.

For those who never got to say goodbye.
For those of us who can't remember the last words they said.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was only one place in the world where Adrian could ever imagine Dumbledore hiding out. There was no building that could contain him- no walls or land that would house him, except that of Hogwarts.

From what Adrian knew and heard, the man was wanted by all the corrupt government. The papers failed to detail where he went and how he moved. There was very little that Adrian could do to find him, except the knowledge that no man could dare resist the allure of a place he called home.

"I know he's at Hogwarts." Adrian spoke in the early morning, when Remus was aware, and when Tonks had finished vomiting. They sat around the table, quiet in the morning haze. They didn't talk louder in fear of waking the three others that lived in the house. They didn't want to face that morning yet.

"I think so too," Remus agreed tiredly, "there's many places in the castle he could hide."

It seemed rational, it seemed realistic.

"Is this it, then?" Tonks asked quietly, hand rubbing the swell of her stomach. "The battle we've all been denying?"

"Tonks-."

"No, you know I'm right, Remus." Tonks argued quietly, "Ever since Bellatrix...we've just been waiting. We've been buying time we don't have anymore."

Remus shook his head, raising a shaky hand to scratch the side of his jaw, "I- I can help-."

"You can't even walk on your own." Adrian argued although he had no fight in him anymore. "You can't leave this house, Remus."

Tonks couldn't either.

Adrian could.

"I think," Adrian exhaled shakily, "that I need to head out soon. Go find Dumbledore and Scamander, put Adalonda down once and for all."

"There's no rush." Remus argued although it felt weak between them. There was a rush, there was a ticking clock that was counting down slowly until Adrian simply...stopped.

"Yes, there is," Adrian smiled weakly, looking down at the kitchen table. He had sat at this table every day for months now, throughout the cold winter. He knew its scratches and stains better than everyone.

"Do you have a plan?" Tonks asked quietly, fiddling with the tips of her black hair. "To stop the basilisk?"

Lutain twisted around Adrian's upper arm, thankfully silent in this quiet discussion.

"Yeah," Adrian sighed, confessing quietly things he didn't want to think about. "I'm not sure how well It'll work, but I think it's the best plan I have."

"Basilisks are magic repellent." Remus croaked out with a worried look in his eye. "You can't spell it Adrian."

"I know." Adrian smiled fondly, "I'm a basilisk too. Her glare can't kill me. I don't know if her venom can."

Tonks cursed and punched the table. She was crying.

"I imagine I'll be in the papers."' Adrian tried to smile. He couldn't quite manage it. "Maybe this ugly mug will actually get his picture taken, eh?"

"You're very handsome." Tonks warbled out, trying to look stern although the fact she was on the edge of tears didn't help. "Don't let anyone ever say that."

"Wow Tonks, really tackling those self-esteem issues, aren't you?" Adrian teased, hands fumbling on the table.

Just…*shite.*

"I want to name the baby after you." Tonks gasped out in a sob, face turning red and something somber. "Adian."

Adrian wasn't faring better. "That's...that's a *horrible* spelling. Do...Aidan, or Ayden."

Tonks laughed out a sob, reaching out with one hand to grab Adrian's one. Remus reached out, clutching the other long thin hand between his calloused fingers.

"Oh, thanks," Adrian smiled at the way their hands stopped his from shaking. "It...I get cold sometimes, and…"'

"Adrian." Remus whispered gently, Adrian looked at him, barely keeping things together.

Remus smiled, tears dripping from his eyes. "I love you."

"I- I love you too." Adrian struggled out, blinking in surprise and outright devastation, "I- I don't know if I've ever said that before."

"I love you." Tonks mirrored, barely audible through the silent sobbing.

Remus' thumb ran over the back of Adrian's hand.

Adrian hung his head and cried.

"I'm so happy I came home." Adrian confessed, entire body shaking violently. Water was giving the table new stains. "It...it was so *short* and...I... I don't want to die and I-..."

"We love you." Remus assured him, repeating it again and again until Adrian could finally let himself say goodbye.

Skylar shuffled downstairs when it was nearing noon, finally feeling rested after a genuine good sleep.

It was strange to be distant from Lutain. It felt like he had a weight off his back, layers and layers of a thick bandage finally unraveled from a long-healed wound. He felt empty in his head, quiet and peaceful. He knew it would take time to get used to it, but he wasn't sure how much time they really had.

Skylar shuffled into the kitchen, hesitating the moment he felt the tension in the room. Tonks and Remus were on the couch, holding each other close. Adrian was nowhere to be seen.

"Hey," Skylar awkwardly announced, sliding further into the room. "Is everything okay?"

Skylar hated that the first thing he could think of, was that Adrian had bolted. He had left without saying a word and now they were trapped in a tiny cottage in a world far too large to think about.

'No,' Skylar reasoned with information he remembered too distinctly, *'he wouldn't leave without a reason.'*

"Hey!" Tonks tried to say happily, instead she sounded like a miserable toad. "I uh, he...Adrian's outside."

Skylar nodded and smiled awkwardly. He lingered a few moments, looking at the decorations or the scratches on the cupboard doors. Once it was far too evident he was lingering out of politeness, he ducked out into the foyer. There were countless coats hanging on the pegs there, the one oversized coat that Adrian had claimed was gone.

Skylar fumbled, trying to jam his feet into boots too small for him. His actual shoes were still upstairs, he didn't want to risk the creaky steps just so he could walk a bit more comfortably. The boots worked- they were a bit snug around the edges of his toes but nothing too horrible. The jacket he grabbed was thin, but better than nothing.

Skylar slipped outside into the frigid air and shivered as it slapped his face ruthlessly.

"Adrian!" Skylar called, quiet and gentle to avoid waking the house further, "Adrian!"

He didn't get a response, but after a few steps off the porch it was easy to see the other.

Adrian was always something fascinating to look at.

He was someone that commanded attention, either from his appearance or his personality or the strange poetic cadence of his speech. Skylar couldn't ever recall the other talking or acting like anything else, he was...he was just *Adrian.*

Skylar could have pictured the same scarred body sitting anywhere. Skylar could imagine him perched on the head of the Giant Squid. Adrian had a quality to him that defied reality, a strange sense that caused Skylar to dismiss the concepts of rationality and accept whatever it was.

Adrian looked sad, and Skylar felt very struck by the unusually open expression on the other.

"Hey," Skylar spoke, wobbling as he walked over towards the other boy. He was careful to keep his balance between the debris on the ground, large chunks of wood scattered into needles as long as his foot.

Adrian traced his fingers over the edge of the frozen stump. His fingertips were turning blue.

"You know," Adrian started in a low murmur, "nobody really gets it. Do they?"

Skylar coughed and shuffled. "Get what?"

Skylar liked to imagine that he and Adrian had somehow gotten closer, but the undeniable truth was that they hadn't. Adrian was still as terrifying as he always had been. There was a link between them that hadn't connected- maybe at one point it could have but somewhere down the path they verged off. Skylar didn't know Adrian, and Adrian still didn't know Skylar.

It made conversations like this that much more jarring.

"The fact we're going to die." Adrian huffed out casually, like he was talking about the weather, "the fact that we're going to leave this place and we're not coming back here."

Skylar twitched, and found he couldn't think of anything to say.

"This is bullshit," Adrian muttered quietly before correcting himself, "no, *dying* is bullshit."

"Yeah," Skylar added after a small pause. "It's...it sucks."

Adrian barked out a laugh, curt and dry and sad. "It's...it's shit. People keep talking about hope and the future, but they don't say anything about the fact I'm not in it."

Skylar walked closer and brushed another stump off with the sleeve of his arm. He sat down, freezing his arse almost instantly.

"I think they're just trying to keep you happy." Skylar confessed. Adrian huffed out a sound, looking offended.

"Trying to keep *me* happy?" Adrian's face twisted into a look of disgust, "that's...I'm dying. This is it. Instead of actually...being productive, everyone keeps skirting around the topic. Everyone keeps acting like I'm going to fall apart-."

"Aren't you?" Skylar asked curiously, tilting his head ever so slightly, "I mean like, I haven't really thought much about it. Dying, I mean I know you're going to kill me but it…"

Adrian swung his leg, kicking the snow carelessly. "It doesn't feel real. It feels like you can push it off, like just wait another day. It's only a few more hours, it's only a little longer."

Skylar blinked quickly, "yeah. It... It doesn't feel...*now."*

Adrian's mouth twitched into a corner of a smile. "And is it now? Is that all we've got?"

Skylar shifted, his rear was nearly numb now.

"I've already said my goodbye." Adrian confessed in a monotone, "It was brief, forgettable."

"What?" Skylar spluttered in shock, "you...you already-..."

"I thought about it," Adrian mused quietly in the strange musical way he sometimes adopted. "Often. Over and over, all the things someone would say before they die, the last words. The single sentence that you remember more than anything else. I think it's...*wrong.* See," Adrian turned, rotating his body to look at Skylar head on.

Skylar flinched at the look of sheer loss and acceptance in Adrian's eyes. A look that made Skylar want to scream and run for Remus at that exact moment.

"Skylar," Adrian started in a low voice. "I don't like goodbyes, because that's the thing you remember. That's the only thing that runs through your head over and over whenever you think of them. I don't want that, I don't want them to...to think of me like *this.* Bloodstained and deranged. I'm not saying anything more, because when they try to remember me they don't have a single memory to use."

Skylar found his words brittle. "That's cruel. You can't do that."

Adrian shrugged, rolling his shoulder. "I'd rather have them scrambling over memories of my entire life, then have them put a single half hour on a pedestal and turn me into something I'm not."

"That's bullshit." Skylar argued instantly, feeling furious and vicious. He stood, kicking the frozen stump until it rang out with a muted noise. Adrian looked at him, eyebrows raised in disinterest. His eyes looked sick in the bright light.

"That's absolute bullshit and you know it," Skylar seethed, withholding the urge to punch the boy right across his scarred nose. "You're going to go back inside because you *can't leave* like this."

Adrian's breath puffed in steam. He tilted his head, looking far too intelligent for his own good.

"Why not?" Adrian asked, blinking slowly. "I never said goodbye to Luna."

The air chilled, and Skylar felt absolutely horrified.

"Luna died," Skylar started, voice quieter as the topic edged into dangerous territory, "suddenly, and without warning. You're not like that, you *know* what's going to happen."

"That's true," Adrian admitted, then he smiled something small and cruel. "Maybe I'm just too vindictive to give them something to remember me by."

Skylar inhaled, thought very clearly, *'fuck it',* and decked Adrian across his face.

Adrian spun on the impact, knocked clear off the log. He scrambled in the snow, looking at Skylar in outright shock. His nose started dripping, bleeding downwards into the crusty collar of the bloodstained jacket.

"Right," Skylar huffed, feeling much more satisfied. "You are an *arse.* I don't get to say goodbye to my mum and dad, so you are going *back inside* right now and saying *goodbye!"*

Adrian's face twisted into a snarl. "Oh! So, I'm just some scapegoat you're trying to live through? Emulating your daddy issues on me now!"

Skylar gaped before shaking his head in disbelief. "You are a bloody hypocrite. No, you're going to

go back inside, because the only way you can ever tell if you've spent your time well is the number of bloody awkward conversations you've had."

Adrian's nostrils flared, blood dripped, and Skylar waited until Adrian slowly stumbled upwards, wavering slowly on his feet.

"What's that cliché bullshit you just said?"

Skylar's nostrils flared, and he stood his ground. "The bloody *truth."*

They stared at each other.

Adrian didn't say anything, but he walked to the house. Skylar followed him.

They opened the door, stepping inside. Ron and Hermione were up, Lutain was curled on the table that everyone was ignoring. Tonks spotted Adrian, eyes widening in surprise. She stood quickly, practically vaulting herself off the couch as quickly as she could in her state.

Adrian shifted next to Skylar, the latter grabbed his arm to keep him in place.

"We thought you-..." Tonks trailed off, looking away pointedly. Remus on the couch, looked at everything in silence. The room stilled, all eyes on Adrian.

"I, ah…" Adrian cut off, clearing his throat uncomfortably. "I... I asked you once, Remus...I asked if you were going to leave me."

Remus nodded slowly, a small smile on his mouth. "I remember," he croaked out gently, "the bath."

"Yeah, right." Adrian grunted, running one hand through his hair nervously. He paced in place, shifting his weight back and forth. He looked so small, in the oversized coat.

"I wanted to apologize." Adrian rushed out in a single breath, "because I am. Now. Leaving you, I mean."

Remus' face didn't falter. Tonks swallowed, and her hands twitched but she stayed where she was.

"I…" 'Adrian squeezed his eyes shut, the skin on his cheekbones puckering. "I've thought about this a lot and...I... People die." Adrian blurted.

Adrian swallowed, curled his hands into fists, and looked up with fire burning.

"Someday, someone you love is going to die, and you can't do anything about it. And... And it hurts, *so bad.* And they tell you that shite, that time heals all wounds, but it *doesn't.* It *doesn't* get better...and I…"

"Adrian," Remus spoke, gentle and soft. He right sided himself slowly, wheezing and wincing as damaged bones moved and jerked. Adrian watched silently, then walked over the moment a spot revealed itself.

He sat, and Remus rested against his side.

"Someday, someone you love will die." Adrian began again, "and it makes life so meaningless and irrelevant. And you can't stop it, and it doesn't get better and it hurts every single day forever."

Remus' arm tightened, and Adrian tried to keep his eyes closed so they wouldn't see his heart.

"...but eventually," Adrian continued forcefully, "...some things seem a little bit okay. Life is shit, it's complete utter *shit,* but because sometimes I can smile at something silly, it means that life is a little bit more meaningful."

Remus chuckled, low and gentle and hugged Adrian until his bones hurt.

"I love you so much," Remus whispered to him gently, foreheads pressing together, "thank you, for saving me."

"I- no." Adrian argued with a wet laugh in his throat. "You saved *me."*

(Thank you.)

"We can't all take Mylla." Adrian spoke from outside, leaning against a tree. The large thestral was over his shoulder, staring at them from the shadows of a pine.

"No shite." Ron grunted, looking around at the small group uncomfortably. "This is going to be bonkers, you know this right?"

Adrian shrugged, "I just need to see Dumbledore and Scamander."

"We're looking for Dumbledore also." Skylar added in, grimacing after a pause, "we *still* need you to bite the cup and locket."

Adrian huffed and shifted, a small glint of Lutain's black body poked out of his collar.

"I think we should apparate." Hermione added, looking nervous but determined. "The wards extend before Hogsmeade, if we apparate in, we could use the hidden tunnels to get into the castle."

"Great," Adrian sighed, glancing down at Lutain as if sharing a conversation. "I can't see this going wrong *at all."*

"The moment they realize who it was that aparated, we're caught." Hermione hushed, chewing on her lower lip. "Apparating isn't good if we all go at once, but if we *don't,* then we won't be able to find each other."

"No offence, mate." Ron blurted, he gave Skylar a pointed look, "but you're not running off on us again."

Adrian almost snorted with the ridiculous statement. He kicked at the ground, scuffing it with his boot.

"I can get to Hogwarts fine." Adrian huffed dramatically, "I still don't see why your arses are trying to get me to come with you."

Hermione huffed and put her hands on her hips. Her eyes lit up, and Adrian's breath stilled in shock.

"Adrian Selwyn," she clipped out sharply and professionally. "I am *very* annoyed with your lack of cooperation. We have established that you are very recognizable, not to mention infamous currently. You wouldn't be able to get *into* the castle before someone recognized you, let alone talk to the Headmaster!"

"Mione-..." Ron started, only to stop once Skylar hushed him gently. Skylar was trying to hold back a smile.

"Oh, *excuse me?"* Adrian shot back in disbelief, "I know that bloody castle better than anyone!"

"And what are you going to do about the guards?" Hermione taunted sharply, "the new wards? The teachers who *know who you are?"*

"I'll *deal with them."*

"You won't be able to deal with them if you're stuck at wand point before you manage to get to the Great Hall!"

Adrian ran one hand through his hair, it stuck up in odd clumps from the insane amount of grease on his scalp. "Fine! What do you suggest then! You apparate in and instantly start running from the Death Eaters? You somehow sneak into the castle once it's on high alert?"

Hermione cocked her hip and crossed her arms. She frowned, eyes narrowing in suspicion.

"You cross-dressed as Bellatrix Lestrange." She snapped out, face blank even as Adrian felt an embarrassed flush light on his cheeks. Lutain made a muffled noise that Skylar identified as laughter.

"It was impressive," Hermione continued without any hesitation, "but you had her *clothes.* You have ways of knowing information about You-Know-Who, which means you'd be able to talk with anyone that chases after us."

Adrian blinked in surprise, more taken aback by the neutral tone of her voice, void of outright accusation.

Hermione continued, clearly not intending for him to say anything at all.

"You're going to kill the basilisk," she sniffed pointedly, as if the notion was foolish, "you said you wanted to meet with Professor Dumbledore and Mr. Scamander. Do you even *know* if they're at Hogwarts? Do you have a way to contact them?"

"I-." Adrian gaped in surprise, feeling like shrinking under her pointed look.

"No, you do *not."* Hermione huffed out. "*Skylar* has a patronus which the Headmaster recognizes. Once Skylar is in the castle, we can easily send a message. The Headmaster will be there, and Mr. Scamander too if we ask, and you'll be in the castle."

Adrian crossed his arms and huffed. "You need *me* to get into Hogsmeade and not have your cover blown. I apparently need your help to get into the castle itself."

"Yes." Hermione nodded before her face sharpened ever so slightly, "not to mention, you're a little defenseless right now, aren't you? I haven't seen you do magic since we've gotten here."

Adrian stared at her unblinkingly. It was impressive how still he could go. He tilted his head ever so slightly, unblinkingly, before he huffed through his nose.

"Only if I get Skylar's invisibility cloak."

"What!" Skylar squeaked out, waving both hands through the air, "what no! Don't drag me into this! That's a family heirloom!"

"Oh, you want to play *that card?"* Adrian gnashed out from between clenched teeth, "because those *blood wards* sure weren't arguing with me!"

"Fine." Hermione clipped out calmly, barely blinking. "You get to borrow Skylar's cloak once all the objects we need destroyed, are destroyed."

Adrian huffed, "great. I break that blasted cup and locket of yours, you give me the cloak."

"After *all* the objects are destroyed." Hermione clarified with a thin smile. "We have one additional object at Hogwarts."

"You bitch." Adrian scowled before he gave a jerky nod, "fine. What are you planning to do to get to Hogsmeade without a problem?"

"Bloody hell, Hermione." Ron gaped in surprise over the entire situation. "How long have you been planning this?"

"Months," Hermione delightfully added, "*months,* Ronald. I couldn't just sit around studying for NEWTS, could I? I had to figure something out."

"You scare me sometimes." Skylar confessed with an affectionate smile, "alright Mione, how are we sneaking in?"

"Well," Hermione started, looking at Adrian with a victorious gleam in her eye, "Your tattoo is large; however, I've never truly seen it. That means it's under some sort of disguise- not a glamour or Mad Eye Moody would have seen it the moment you met. Your tattoo must have some other type of magical communication- since you're parseltongue it would easily mean that your mark must have some level of intelligence to carry difficult messages or stay out of sight. It could be a number of things, obviously, but all that matters is that you can summon your mark at will to talk to Y- You-Know-Who."

Adrian blinked and quickly recovered. His jaw clicked shut, and he tried to ignore the equally speechless looks on Ron and Skylar's face.

"So, what?" Adrian challenged, "you want to invite that bastard for tea?"

Ron leaned over and whispered very quietly into Skylar's ear, *'daddy issues, mate?'*

"I want you to say that you found us," Hermione clarified with frown, as if Adrian was daft for not comprehending what her plan was. "You found out we plan to go to Hogsmeade. We wait for a while, then we apparate away and you follow. Since you're chasing us, others wouldn't be called in to assist."

"And then all four of us are at Hogsmeade with no problem, and without father telling anyone about where you are." Adrian finished with a small curse, "*bloody hell,* except that means the man will *know* you're at Hogwarts."

Hermione paused ever so slightly before she jutted out her chin. "So, what?"

Skylar inhaled sharply and tried to disguise it as a cough.

Oh, Oh Hermione was a *genius.*

Voldemort's Horcruxes, they had captured all the ones they knew about except for the snake. Dumbledore had the ring, the diary had been destroyed according to Adrian, which left the single

artifact at Hogwarts itself. (It was the only place they could ever rationalize something being.)

With Adrian not being able to get his cloak for whatever purpose he wanted, Adrian would be forced to assist them in finding and then destroying the last Horcrux.

Since Adrian would have contacted Voldemort about where they were going, Voldemort would be able to confront them once they sent a signal that his greatest secret had been found out and dealt with accordingly. They would have a defensive front, the *entire castle,* Dumbledore and all the Order to help them in a final stand!

Adrian would be forced to stay with them until the Basilisk was destroyed- which wasn't an issue on any part. If Adrian managed to kill the basilisk and then left, then they could use the basilisk venom to destroy the horcruxes instead.

They would have to take care of the monster before sending any signal for Voldemort to chase after them, it would be lethal to try and defend on both fronts especially with so little time to reinforce their ranks.

"That sounds good to me." Skylar spoke, trying to sound confident although it mostly was just strained. "That okay with everyone else?"

Adrian looked at him with a frown, brows furrowing ever so slightly. He could tell that they were keeping something from him, Skylar only hoped that he didn't press it until after they were actually *there.*

"...Fine." Adrian spoke slowly, eyes flickering to the single massive thestral that had remained- the one he called Mylla. "The cloak."

"I have it,"' Skylar assured him calmly, trying to keep his breathing regular. "I promise you, we just need you to do one thing."

"You need me to do *so many things."* Adrian complained under his breath, looking ready to punch a tree. "Now I have to bloody contact *him* because of you?"

Adrian continued to grumble before he reached for his coat and began to strip.

Hermione flushed bright red as Adrian kept removing layers. The scarf came off, the outer jacket, then the sweater. Lutain looked thoroughly annoyed with all the movement, but a simple warming charm on both the boy and snake quickly had Adrian's shivering stop. He wouldn't thank Skylar for it, but he didn't say anything either.

"Alright," Adrian stretched, looking tall and skeletal in a grotesque way. The scar tissue of his electrical burns stood out starkly, nothing about him looked appealing.

Adrian closed his eyes opened his mouth and *hissed.*

"Nagini." He summoned, flinching when his skin felt like tearing. It split through, black ink over hard bone and Adrian was twitching at the unsettling sensation. Skylar felt a phantom flare and found himself covering his left shoulder.

The tattoo kept moving, over and around, looping over his boy and rubbing on him like rope burn. Adrian tried to settle himself, closing his eyes to fight off the nausea.

"Nagini," he murmured to the tattoo, *"is father present?"*

A pause, the tattoo did another loop before hissing out a single dumb affirmative.

"Good," Adrian muttered lowly, trying to resist the urge to claw the ink off. *"Tell him that I found Skylar Potter, running to Hogsmeade."*

The snake hissed out and then dove into the meat of his stomach. Adrian keeled over gasping like it had bludgeoned him.

Adrian only managed to catch his breath before the tattoo returned, a low pain filled groan slipping through his mouth.

"You okay-."

"Shut up!" Adrian panted out, not glancing upwards at the concerned Skylar even as he braced himself on his knees to try and recover from Nagini sprouting around his spine. "I'm fine!"

Nagini circled around, pulling heavily on his flesh. *"Master wonders why so long? Why not strike sooner? Very disappointed."*

At an earlier point in his life, Adrian would have felt ashamed by that. He would have felt crippled at the knowledge that he had disappointed the man- but now, now he felt only fury and rage at the blatant manipulation.

"It wasn't easy," Adrian snapped out, his mouth clicking audibly as the tattoo waited for his words. *"I'm working on taking down Dumbledore too."*

"No." Nagini cut him off robotically. *"Dumbledore is not to be attacked."*

Adrian almost recoiled, instead his mind scrambled for thoughts as to *why.*

"Why is that?" he hissed, righting himself slowly to adjust to the blood pressure change. *"Why can't I go after him?"*

"Dumbledore is not to be attacked." The dumb lump of ink echoed.

"You useless animal," Adrian spat out in English, running one hand through his hair before he jumped back into Parseltongue. *"Why not! Where is he?"*

"Dumbledore is not to be attacked."

"Where is he so I can stay away and not attack him?"

The tattoo paused, considering his question. *"...Hogwarts."*

Great, excellent, they were in the right place.

"Alright, go away now." Adrian dismissed the ink, flinching as it dove into the hollow of his sternum and collarbones.

Adrian winced and rolled his shoulders, cracking the joints a few times before fumbling for his clothes. He pawed through them, pulling on the heavy warm coat at the soonest convenience.

"You make a habit of shedding in the cold." Lutain noted somewhat amused.

"Shut up," Adrian countered with a gentle bop to the snake's nose, "at least this time there aren't any cows."

"I have no idea what you could be saying right now," Skylar interrupted smoothly with a far too chipper voice for the body horror he had just witnessed, "but how did it go?"

"He knows." Adrian shrugged back, trying to stretch out the annoying kink in his spine. "We've got time before we can run."

"Wonderful!" Hermione clapped happily, reaching into a small purse on her hip to pull out a massively large picnic blanket. "I packed lunch!"

Adrian stared. They looked at him expectantly.

"On one hand, I hate you all so much." Adrian deadpanned. "On the other hand, I am *starving."*

"I came prepared." Hermione pacified, pulling out something in foil that was ridiculously large. She opened it, revealing an unnecessarily large bowl of plain rice.

"My parents were one of those fallout shelter people," Hermione explained quietly, "It ah, it helped."

Adrian huffed and grabbed the bowl, plopping down before taking the offered spoon. At this point it was just empty calories that wouldn't do anything, mindless chewing and eating in the desperate hope it would drive off the hunger pangs.

"Skylar." Adrian abruptly spoke, not pausing in his careful shoveling of food. The boy jolted, looking up from his sad looking sandwich.

"Yeah?"

"Dursleys." Adrian said, "I never heard the entire story."

Adrian's spoon clicked on the large bowl. Hermione forced herself to keep eating, Ron flat out stopped.

"Oh, ah…" Skylar trailed off uncomfortably, fiddling with the corner of the blanket. It was beginning to get soggy, the warming charm was melting the snow around them.

"They passed away a while ago." Skylar finished very vaguely, not looking up at all.

Adrian almost snorted. "I know. Was it Bella?"

Skylar didn't look up, instead he fiddled with the blanket over and over. Ron got back to eating, Hermione too.

"It wasn't good." Skylar shivered, "there...there was some sort of spell that...made people explode. They...they didn't find enough of the bodies to…. we thought you were with them, there wasn't enough of anyone left to know who was who."

Adrian looked down thoughtfully. He hadn't...he hadn't ever considered that the corpses of the Dursley's were so mauled and unrecognizable, that they assumed he was within the gore.

"Rumpervis, I think." Adrian mumbled, shifting the rice around in his bowl, "or something related. It...it explodes birds. Maybe it works on people, I never tried."

Adrian went back to eating. He found he was the only one.

They popped into Hogsmeade loudly, Adrian following a second after. Instantly they moved, darting between the buildings for the shelter of an alley. It was dark, dusk rising and lampposts burning with captured pixies. Adrian didn't imagine the taverns would be open long, with the increased outrageous price of butterbeer.

They scuttled down the street as fast as they could, anxious in the open presence of civilization. They had been living in the woods, surviving off rations for so long, it was a strange new word to have cobblestone and mortar.

It was cold, but the adrenaline kept them warm. Adrian breathed in the moist air of the heating charm, shrugging in the foreign feel of the light cloak around his shoulders. It had been a very long time since he wore it; sitting on his cloak for long rides on Mylla hadn't damaged the fabric at all.

"Three ahead." Lutain warned, Adrian reached out and gestured against the wall. The other three followed, ducking behind frozen barrels to be hidden as three men walked past. The street was much quieter than they expected, it seemed sadder too.

"Honeydukes." Skylar whispered, peering out across the large open walkway they'd have to sprint if they wanted to get into the store. They likely would set off a few wards, but at this level of tension Adrian couldn't care less.

It was almost fun in a strange way, the exhilarating thrill of adrenaline coursing through his veins. The chance of being caught, the risk that was pinning them down with a lengthy glare.

"You need to get into it?" Adrian murmured quietly, thoughts racing. He could easily move across the clearing unseen in his animagus form, but that wouldn't fix permeating the wards of the store itself. He would need to use magic, and he wasn't fond of the idea of vomiting blood everywhere he walked. He'd need to get someone else across the clearing with him. He couldn't shrink them, less he be stuck with a shrunken ally without the ability to return them to normal.

He could always give one of them his cloak, walking around wearing the infamous Cerestes outfit would easily deter anyone looking at them. Adrian didn't want to give it up for a selfish reason, so he instantly dismissed that idea.

"Why don't we set a building on fire, cause a distraction?" Adrian proposed. Three glares in his direction easily denied that option as well. Ron bit his tongue to keep the insult from leaking out.

"Fire would be too obvious." Hermione hushed under her voice, peering around critically. "Any sort of attention will attract people we don't want right now. We can't just walk over there, not without being spotted and attacked."

Adrian frowned and shifted uncomfortably, "I could."

All three slowly looked at him, Lutain a reassuring weight on his shoulders.

"You could…" Hermione trailed off slowly, "I don't think the people here would like you very much."

"Well," Adrian huffed, tucking the cloak of his hood up to mask his features entirely. "It never stopped me before." He could feel the slight suction, the charms activating and masking his face forever. It felt odd now, to be so careful in disguise when everyone knew his birth name.

The snow felt so far away, everything hidden behind the impenetrable fabric of the cloak. He felt so far away, protected and dressed like a military outfit for dressage.

Adrian didn't like the way the cloak stuck to him, the way each forearm had a wand on it. His right arm had the second wand he went through Hogwarts with. The left arm had the Holly Phoenix feather wand that he never should have had.

He was armed, and he didn't want to be.

"Ready, Lutain?"

His friend tightened a fraction of a movement. *"Yes."*

"Come right back," Hermione hissed at him, grasping his arm so tightly her nails dug in. He ignored her, shrugging her off.

Adrian walked across the lit street, ignoring the three hidden heroes behind him. He walked across the snow, over the cobblestone towards the closed down storefront.

It was dark, wards in affect. Adrian reached out, tracing numb fingertips over the frosted glass. There weren't any sweets in the window anymore, instead it was empty and scarce. Adrian had never seen it look this sad before.

He tried the handle, finding it locked. He didn't know why he tried, it didn't matter.

He heard feet approaching, too quick over the ground to be anyone walking. It was purposefully, impossible to hide with all the snow.

"Master," Lutain warned quietly, rustling against his skin. Adrian didn't remove his hand, instead he closed his eyes and exhaled slowly.

"Ay kid," Someone spoke, gruff and accented. Low level economic status, someone itching for food or money given the trying times. "What's in your pocket, eh? Looking for sweets?"

Oh, the economic times. They wouldn't be able to just...break in. The wards would be reinforced, likely linked to the government if they sold food. Their plan was ruined already. Hermione hadn't thought of that, neither had Adrian. They would need a different way inside.

"No," Adrian spoke quietly, blandly. "I'm not in the mood for much anymore."

The footsteps got closer, two men. They were large, looking and gaunt. Adrian turned to see them approach from the corner of his cloak, they looked cold and thin under the lamp light.

"Oh wow, the kid's looking for something else." The one on the left joked, elbowing his partner. The man drew his wand, the other pulled his out as well, waving it threateningly without looking qualified.

Adrian reached up slowly and pulled down his cloak hood.

The two men flinched back, likely at his grisly features. He could see the moment they clued in, the moment their breathing hitched and stopped puffing in front of their faces.

Adrian reached up to scratch his cheek broadly. He shifted his weight, feeling completely at ease.

"Hey," Adrian shrugged with a sigh, breath puffing as he cracked his neck and blinked slowly, "You two looking for a fun time?"

The man on the left shuddered and took a step back, "Wecker- Wecker
that's *him,* that's...that's *bloody Harry Potter."*

Adrian felt a small sharp pain at being identified at that. He didn't want to be related to that family. Then again, he didn't want to be identified as his father's son anymore either.

Who was he?

"I am," Adrian smiled thinly, trying to keep his expression as calm as could be given the quickly escalating situation. "And you two?"

The one stuttered, stumbling over words while the other glared at him with a square jaw. This one was Wecker, although Adrian didn't recognize the name nor the face. Likely a brutish man who was taking advantage of the current times through brute force alone.

"...You don't look like all that." Wecker huffed out, his companion looked ready to bolt.

"I guess I don't." Adrian agreed dismissively. He could imagine Skylar and his gang, watching the exchange with a bated breath. Adrian had work to do, he couldn't have knowledge of his presence extend and spread around this quickly. "Break into this store for me."

They looked baffled, skittish, and quickly growing defiant.

"We don't take orders from you," Wecker ground out from his clenched jaw. His wand was wavering, still pointed downwards but in Adrian's direction. That wouldn't do, the man was still too much of a risk.

"Rude." Adrian hummed back, trying not to appear as anxious as he certainly felt. *"Lutain, how fast can you go with all the snow?"*

Lutain slid out from the hood, coiling around Adrian's throat in the well-practiced intimidation technique. Although Adrian was thinner and felt older, and Lutain was thicker and aged, it felt like a well-rehearsed movement unbound by the claws of time.

The men gaped, flinching at the parseltongue. Lutain tasted the air, circling into thick lazy coils.

"I can strike one for sure." Lutain responded with a critical eye. *"The other may be trouble. I am warm, but snow is not easy."*

Bless Skylar and his petty warming charms and spells.

"Right," Adrian hummed, stroking along Lutain's scales with the flat of his fingers. "Men? Shall we?"

They flustered, gulping and looking ready to scream.

"Master," Lutain warned instantly, *"someone new."*

Adrian didn't turn, but his back did stiffen. He heard the approach a few seconds after, large stomping steps quickly accompanied by a tall somewhat familiar man. He had a short-cropped beard, weathered skin and piercing eyes. The scowl on his face could rival Adrian's own, the wrinkles and crow's feet didn't help.

"Oi!" The newcomer shouted, winded and hoarse but still loud and commanding. "Scram!"

The two men bolted easily, leaving Adrian standing along under a lamppost outside a boarded-up store being approached by someone who looked out of place in this decade.

"Wonderful." Adrian drawled to hide the growing panic he felt- was this man one of his Father's

men? It was more likely it was an independent wizard, someone who recognized Adrian; someone choosing to work accordingly on his own. Adrian could be at risk, but the new man showed no intentions of stopping his harsh stomps.

"I…" Lutain trailed off unsure, tail tip twitching. Adrian stiffened himself in preparation of shifting if needed.

"Boy," The man grunted, not unlike Hagrid. He came to a stomp, thick coat fluttering around him dramatically but Adrian could tell it was just coincidence. "You that Selwyn brat?"

Adrian's jaw dropped ever so slightly, he caught it before it would have been noticeable.

"You going to just stand there?" The man demanded with a scowl, "c'mon then!"

He turned and started to *walk away.*

Adrian took a half step forward before he shouted out, "If you think I'm going with you you're *insane."*

The man laughed, "coming from *you?* Shite, I heard you were bad, but do you ever use that bloody head of yours?"

Adrian's hand twitched and he smelled smoke. He exhaled and quelled his urge.

"Aberforth." The man grunted out with another frown, displeased that he had to say even that. "Let's go then."

A shuffle, a clatter then suddenly a red nosed cold Skylar was bolting from the alley. His eyes were bright in surprise and disbelief, and he was once again acting stupid.

"He should have drowned in a bathtub." Lutain exhaustedly inputted to Adrian's own cursing.

"Aberforth!" Skylar shouted, ignoring the hush they were trying to keep. Aberforth swore crudely, swishing his wand in a complex maneuver that Adrian recognized as a silencing ward. The fact the man could cast it fast- likely faster than Adrian's father himself, said something.

"Blasted boy! Don't go shouting names about!" Aberforth spat, running one hand through his short grey hair, "rotten lot, you all are. A goddamn *magical recession* you bloody monsters gave us."

Adrian scrambled to think of anything to say.

Skylar didn't look at all phased by the insult, likely because Lutain had thoroughly trained the boy to ignore jabs against him. Skylar instead fumbled over the snow to go *right up to the stranger,* scanning the man's face for *something* Adrian didn't know.

"It *is* you!" Skylar sounded pleased, a large grin on his face, "do you know how to get into the castle?"

Adrian choked, sputtering over his words. "Skylar how would *he-."*

Aberforth gave a grunt and a nod, scowling at Adrian as if he had kicked the man's prized pet opossum. Lutain made a small whining noise. Adrian would have thought his friend was used to this level of chaos already.

"Course I do." The man mumbled under his breath, having the audacity to sound *offended.* "Get your friends and this baby Dark Lord out of here, we're drawing eyes."

"You're not." Lutain assured Adrian, still on the watch for any scents or movements.

Adrian's nostrils flared. He crossed his arms, scowling and gnashing his teeth. "I'm not going *anywhere* until you explain further."

Aberforth looked ready to leave him out in the cold, Skylar rushed to soothe the situation with one of his awkward smiles and frustratingly endearing cowlicks.

"No no no! It's fine!" Skylar tried to soothe Adrian like he was some sort of startled deer, "he's a friend of ours!"

"I've never met you before in my life, boy." Aberforth grunted. Skylar woefully ignored it.

"He's going to help us!"

"Should I investigate?" Lutain timidly asked, just as baffled by the situation as Adrian was.

"Oi! No snake talking, or I'll curse you!" Aberforth grunted out.

Adrian recoiled in offense. "You start cursing me *I'll* start cursing *you!"*

Skylar jolted in alarm, "no no, Adrian *no* that is a *very not good idea."*

"This is a disaster." Lutain bemoaned in distress, *"you're going to make me vomit from this."*

"Stop it Skylar, you're giving Lutain anxiety!"

"Adrian *please don't curse anyone here,* we really need to be sneaky about this and you looking like a corpse isn't going to help anything!"

"What's this?" Aberforth shouted into the fray, "you're already looking like a ruddy corpse to me!"

"At least I'm not a goddamn *geriatric."*

Aberforth looked ready to roll up his sleeves and start punching.

"Okay okay, introductions are in order!" Skylar shrieked out, looking and sounding a lot more panicked than his words suggested. "Adrian- Adrian *no.* Er, Aberforth this is Adrian, he's got a snake Lutain and this magical parasite. Er, this is Aberforth, he's Dumbledore's brother and-."

At the same moment, Adrian shrieked out "*are you kidding me!'"* in absolute dismay; Aberforth shouted back in alarm "*magical parasite?"*

Skylar pressed both his palms into his face and resisted the urge to scream.

"Yes! Yes okay!" Skylar hissed out frustrated, 'Adrian's got a Vitiday-,"

"Vitaedax." Adrian corrected him with a numb expression of shock.

"Right right, a Vitaedax, and Aberforth is Dumbledore's older brother. They're related, lots of great family bonding. Can we *please* go?"

Aberforth crossed his arms and took a half step backwards. His expression was stony as he glanced at Adrian, surveying his high-quality cloak and the gleaming black snake. Old eyes traced the sharp ridges of Skylar's cheekbones and the pointed protrusion of his jaw. The hollows of his cheek, the sunken bags below his eyes.

"Vitaedax, I know that one." Aberforth grunted out with an unreadable look over his face. He gave a slow nod, looking at Adrian once again before jerking his head back the direction he came from. Skylar let out a breath of relief, signaling for Ron and Hermione to shuffle out.

The entire walk back to Aberforth's pub (The Hog's Head? *Really?*), the man kept stealing glances at Adrian's face.

(There were uncanny parallels from those diseased and poisoned. A strange likeness, that couldn't be explained by the matter of flesh or the matter of blood. It was the eyes, the strange lilting of speech. The same way that he and Ariana had both accepted death before they ever truly began to live.

It made Aberforth feel like a very old man, doomed to watch history repeat itself over and over.)

Chapter End Notes

And here we are.
I felt the need to leave an end note as so many people commented in response to the previous chapter regarding Child Abuse and other heavy topics.
I want you all to stay strong. Perhaps it lasts forever, maybe it will. I can promise you, that there will be moments- maybe even seconds, where it all seems well and for that time, it is.
Join me as my heart breaks further.
7 Chapter Left.

Link to Antithesis Artwork

Thespian

Chapter Summary

Where Adrian hates suitcases, metaphorically punches Daphne, and is a drama queen.

Or

That feeling when you don't have your fucking clicky boots

Chapter Notes

Thanks to the Discord for helping me with ideas and listening to me audio-read this for errors!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Adrian Selwyn felt like an absolute fool.

He had overlooked something so basic, so *ordinary* in his wealth of knowledge. He dismissed his information of magical creatures and similar topics and along with that, he dismissed Newt Scamander much more than he should have.

Newt Scamander was famous for his wonderful findings in Magizoology; the discoveries he made revolutionized the world. He was a hero in the eyes of many, but all of this was possibly only from the man's *phenomenal* ward-work. It didn't seem like much, but wards were everything when it came to magical creatures.

A ward to dispel fire, a ward to regulate arctic temperatures. A ward to corral and contain dangerous creatures, a ward to funnel and ensnare those that got away.

Adrian had *overlooked that,* he hadn't even considered that Newt Scamander could have a greater role to play.

Let alone, that he, Albus Dumbledore, and countless others were now living essentially, out of a *suitcase.*

"I hate everything about this." Adrian deadpanned, trying not to twitch away from the movement near his shoulder. Dumbledore adjusted himself on the large plush chair, willfully ignoring the way that they were sitting on ornate furniture in the middle of a pasture.

Newt Scamander contemplated, resting his old head in his gnarled hands. His cup of tea was in front of him, half drunk.

"Well," The man confessed awkwardly, "given our situations, it's certainly not the *worst* idea."

He was right. Adrian was simply furious he hadn't even factored a magically expanded and heavily warded suitcase into his equation.

"Ah, do not let it bother you." Dumbledore advised with a small smile tugging at the corner of his lips, "it was certainly a surprise to my old eyes."

'Liar,' Adrian wanted to spit out, *'I bet you helped him make it.'*

Newt Scamander shuffled uncomfortably, clearing his throat. Ron, Hermione, and Skylar looked nearly gleeful watching Adrian and Dumbledore interact.

"So," Dumbledore sighed, stretching and groaning quietly at the movement. Adrian glared even more fiercely at the noise. It was an obvious show, the old man could easily duel everyone in the room and come out unscathed. "I must admit, I was quiet startled when you four appeared."

Skylar grinned, expression so wide and bright Adrian nearly had a headache from looking at him directly. "Oh! No, we were looking for you, Professor!"

Dumbledore's eyes flickered over Skylar's body before settling on his face. Somehow, his face softened in relief. "I see you are unaccompanied anymore."

Adrian shifted backwards, wishing Lutain hadn't run off the moment he felt the warmed air and warded pasture around them. Adrian wouldn't be surprised if there was a fully equipped ecosystem inside this trunk.

"Ah, no." Skylar's grin didn't falter. "Lutain's back where he belongs! Headmaster I am *so* happy to see you!"

Adrian's stomach twisted in nausea at the sound; Skylar's excitement and selfless delight was making something curdle wrongly.

"It's been a rough ride," Ron confessed, running one hand through his lengthening hair. "Merlin knows how we managed it."

"I would presume young Ms. Granger here is the key to your success." Dumbledore's eyes twinkled in amusement. Hermione flushed at the praise, ducking her head.

Adrian shifted uncomfortably, feeling even more out of place with the discussion.

"No! Honestly, it was a combined effort from everyone!" Skylar quickly defended her, looking far too proud.

"It must have been quite difficult," Newt Scamander muttered under his breath, tracing the lid of his teacup, "things have become quite rotten out there."

Dumbledore's smile fell ever so slightly, his wrinkles duplicated in number on his brow.

"The world has gone to shite." Adrian deadpanned for everyone here, "the economy is bloody crazy, politics is a sham, at this point I would be surprised if all international ties were cut off."

"Ah," Dumbledore sighed heavily, "that is the concern we have at hand, Mr. Po-."

Adrian *hissed,* a single noise of wordless frustration. Dumbledore obediently fell silent.

"'I don't *care,"* Adrian began with nostrils flaring, "what you are doing. I want *into that castle,* and I am going to find Adalonda and I am going to *kill her."*

Everyone sat quietly around the table. Somewhere far above, Fawkes was flying freely in the sky.

"I see," Dumbledore sighed once again, reclining on his plush chair as if his bones pained him. "I assume you have thought of how to accomplish this? A basilisk is no easy task, let alone one as old as this one."

Adrian huffed and crossed his arms. Scamander slid forward, resting his forearms on the table as he looked at Adrian in the eye.

"Adrian." The man started, treating him gently yet cautiously. "I understand you are mad, but a basilisk is *not* an easy target."

"I know that!" Adrian spat back in frustration. Why couldn't they all *see?* Adalonda was- she was *dangerous.*

Not to mention Adrian *still* didn't understand why Dumbledore was apparently off limits to kill, or what his father was *doing.*

"I know that." Adrian repeated, forcing his temper to settle, "but she is *mine.* I *know her,* if anyone can try to kill her, than it's me."

Skylar cleared his throat uncomfortably. "Not to, er...to be rude, mate. But ah, I've thought of how to kill the thing myself and I couldn't come up with a single plan."

"Mr. Selwyn," Scamander interrupted bluntly although in a hurried voice, "I feel that it's important we do not dance around the single problem we have. I'm afraid you wouldn't survive any attack against a basilisk; I have no doubt's you'd be *capable* of it, but what then? What after? I'm afraid that with your state it's simply too dangerous to attack a basilisk with magic-."

"Basilisk's have magic retardant scales." Adrian interrupted sharply, "I've already thought that through. Adalonda isn't affected by cold or heat either, so burning her isn't going to work- Skylar before you say anything I *know you thought that was my plan."*

Skylar flushed and closed his mouth.

Dumbledore coughed to disguise a short laugh.

"I'm immune to her eyes, nobody else is." Adrian deadpanned shortly, "that includes animals. Lutain will have to stay with one of you, or here."

Skylar inhaled sharply but nodded, eyes flickering around anxiously.

"What else?" Scamander asked, his face completely serious. His fingers were tapping along the lip of his tea cup.

Adrian glanced at Hermione, who was biting her lower lip. Adrian arched his brows, the girl instantly scrambled.

"No no!" She squawked in surprise and embarrassment, "I er, I think that you should take the lead."

That was a surprise.

Hermione blushed further. "I...I'm not Selwyn, after all."

Oh.

Adrian exhaled and nodded, eyes looking down at the table as he contemplated quickly. "A...A basilisk is a reptile. It's a *monster* of one, but it's still a reptile. It can thermoregulate better, has *ridiculous* eyesight and heat pits so light changes nothing. It's sense of smell is decent, above average but nothing spectacular. Hearing is similar, the spines on the back of our- *her* head can help detect movement, so sneaking up on her is difficult to begin with. She's got incredibly venomous teeth, multiple like a boa or a python, not like general snake fangs. I don't think her belly scales are any weaker than the rest of her body."

Scamander ran one hand along the edge of his jaw, deep in thought as he looked at the table. Ron was shifting uncomfortably, unable to contribute to the discussion at hand.

"What about personality?" Ron offered quietly, clearly not wanting to be there. "I mean, you can talk to the ruddy thing. Is it...scared by something?"

Adrian wanted to laugh at the idea of Adalonda being *scared.*

"Merlin no," Adrian huffed out, smirking sardonically, "...god that would make this so much easier. She's...she's *wonderful.* She's everything I ever wanted, kind, compassionate. Knowledgeable, helpful. I didn't even know about her ambitions until...afterwards."

"That is most distressing." Dumbledore muttered lowly, one hand stroking his unkempt beard. He looked distracted, gazing off in thought.

"She's my friend." Adrian confessed quietly, "...or, she was."

Things have changed.

"What about natural deterrents?" Scamander asked hesitantly, "Marigolds? Garlic?"

Adrian huffed and shook his head, "If you think a *plant* is going to freak her out, then you're hopeless."

"I imagine you can't just like, I don't know." Skylar scratched his cheek, "stab her with a sword or something?"

Adrian inhaled, held his breath, than exhaled slowly.

"Skylar," Adrian closed his eyes to keep his mind as calm as possible. "You are an absolute idiot and a useless contribution to this table."

A pause.

"That's fair." Skylar conceded with a nod, "but like, can't you just kill her from the inside or something then? Poke out an eye?"

Hermione thwacked his arm suddenly, "Skylar!" She hissed under her breath, as if the innocent question was going to start a fight.

Adrian rolled his eyes.

Then, he froze.

"Oh." Adrian blinked in surprise, mind racing frantically as he thought. "Dumbledore, is Filch still working at Hogwarts?"

Daphne hurried down the steps towards the Slytherin Common room, keeping her head low and ears peeled.

The world was so different now. Everything was so so different.

Draco never returned, he had vanished almost entirely after the mysterious letter over the summer. She had been waiting on a baited breath, but she never heard anything else.

Then, the economy broke and Daphne was far too informed to ever suspect it as something other than foul play. Her parents had been discussing it nervously, phrases about marriage jumped back and forth between them.

Astoria though, Astoria always looked like she was *haunted.*

Astoria was Daphne's life now, she was all she had left. Not Blaise and Pansy who quickly turned sour and petty, not Millicent who acted so aggressive and impulsive she nearly had been expelled twice now, and certainly not Theo who was more vicious than Adrian Selwyn had ever been.

Oh Adrian Selwyn.

(Oh Harry Potter.)

How everything came together so sickeningly wrong.

The last thing Daphne Greengrass expected, was a small flash of movement from the corner of her eye.

Daphne didn't know every corridor in the castle, but she was observant. She had been permitted to roam about last year under Headmistress Umbridge. Headmistress McGonagall wasn't nearly so cruel, but she was more strict than ever before. Either personal policy, or the difficult wartimes.

(Everyone wondered when they would be attacked. Everyone wondered when the depleting amount of food at the feasts would finally run out.)

The movement was fast, quick against the floor.

Daphne instantly had her wand out, pointed at the shapeless thing in the shadows under a tapestry.

A pause, Daphne's heart pounded in her throat.

Slowly, the animal moved, drawing itself further into the light. It was early morning, before others would be awake for the feast. Daphne found pacing at such an early hour helped keep her mind sharp and active- she needed to be that now.

But this, but *this,* was something else entirely.

It was a snake, long and thick. Daphne briefly wondered how it had disguised itself at all. It was dark in colour, maybe a dark olive or a dark brown; the light was too dim to truly see what colour the scales were.

Daphne could briefly see damages along its body, like someone had thwacked it with a heavy branch. Some patches looked shattered, like broken glass painted along its back along its

impressively elastic girth.

It pulled out, its head circling around. Head pointed and long- more like a dragon's muzzle yet undeniably serpentine. It's eyes were clouded like how all reptiles looked when shedding, acidic yellow with a strange green rim where eye met socket.

Merlin, how long *was this thing?*

Eight feet? More? It was thicker than Daphne's thigh, maybe the girth of a small watermelon. It was *huge,* watching her with a long forked tongue that flickered distended in the air.

'It's going to kill me,' Daphne thought distantly, feeling panic and adrenaline freeze her in place. *'A spy for the Dark Lord is going to kill me.'*

The snake tasted the air. Between its two eyes, a spike lifted- as thick around as a twig from a racing broom. It arched upwards, pointing towards the sky and revealed a bright scarlet sail.

Daphne's breathing stopped entirely.

It hissed, slithered closer and lifted its entire upper body from the floor.

Daphne squeezed her eyes closed, hoping that it would kill her *quickly.*

Something cracked, a small popping noise like a knuckle shifting or maybe a book closing. The air moved, gentle drafts shifting the loose strands of hair along her cheeks. Her face itched, it had broken out in thick welts of acne from stress.

'This is it,' she thought to herself with a dazed sort of clarity. She wished she could have held her sister one last time.

Something exhaled, sickly sweet like rotting fruit.

"'Hello Daphne."

Daphne snapped her eyes open with a forced inhale.

Adrian Selwyn smiled at her, like how portraits of the deceased were always smiling.

"Oh my god," She breathed, pupils dilating as she crumbled to the floor. Her knees gave way under her, the stone was rough against her ankle bones. "Oh my *god."*

Adrian looked at her, the thin fixed expression chilled her.

Daphne started to sob, and Adrian didn't look away once.

"Are you going to kill me?" Daphne asked, hiccuping in hysteria. She wished her hair wasn't tied up, or that she had more of it to trail down her sides. She needed to twist her fingers in it, to try and pull and pull herself together.

Adrian's face fell then, twitching into a frown. He looked away, face almost sad. "Do you think I am?"

Daphne sobbed and curled her legs in closer. She never got to say goodbye to her sister.

"Do you believe me something so cruel?" Adrian asked her, gently and rhetoric. "That I'm a monster?"

Daphne shook her head desperately, uncaring of how undignified she looked.

"I suppose you knew me, better than most." Adrian contemplated quietly. "You dug and dug for information, like a maggot in a wound. Did you like what you found, Daphne? Did you like what you're ridiculous childish obsession with blackmail gave you?"

"No! No I didn't!" Daphne defended, her voice was lifting, higher into the shrieking noise she could make. "I- I didn't mean for any of this to happen!"

Adrian looked almost *pitying.* "I've learned in life, that the most unfortunate things commonly befall us."

Daphne's teeth were chattering, her wand forgotten.

She was at his mercy, and Adrian looked at her with pity.

"In all my experiences and all my shadows," Adrian whispered to himself and to her, "forever chasing forward. If only I had turned and looked back."

The sun was rising on a new day, and Adrian Selwyn had never looked more horrific in Daphne's memory.

"You know, Daphne." Adrian sighed wistfully, "It's impossible to look at someone and gauge their experiences from their past self to present. It's useless to look at me like that, I honestly don't know what I'm doing talking with you. I have some things to do."

"The prophecy?" Daphne blurted, trembling and filled with a irreversible sense of hope, "the one that- that was in the news? You're going to save us, you're going to-."

"No." Adrian spoke shortly. Looking at her with acidic eyes both yellow and green. "I'm not."

Daphne refused to accept that. "But...but you're the Chosen One, right? He- you can save us all, right?"

Adrian's face clouded over. "No."

"But you're *supposed to!* You're *Harry Potter!* You're supposed to-."

"I'm supposed to do nothing." Adrian shifted his weight, face blank but very frosty. "I owe you all *nothing.* You all thought Skylar Potter was the Chosen One until a year ago, have you thrown away your hero already?"

Daphne's head was buzzing with words and she couldn't *think.* She needed to keep Astoria *safe.* She had to bargain with a devil and a monster if only to keep her sister *safe.*

"But you're the real Chosen One!" She shouted, uncaring of how her voice echoed. Students up for breakfast would be stumbling across them soon.

Adrian's lip curled back into a small grimace, "I owe you all *nothing.* I'll treat you all, like how the world has treated me. I'm going to stand aside, and do *nothing."*

Daphne was crying, desperation tugging on her heart and making her eyes burn. "But you're supposed to *save us!"*

Adrian shook his head slowly, ashamed of what had happened to a once noble opponent. "No. Go find your own bloody martyr."

Adrian twisted, a small popping noise and the large sailed snake was slithering away, hugging the fading shadows of dawn.

Daphne was left, lying curled and crying in the middle of an empty hallway.

The tunnels were small, expanding under Adrian's activation in parseltongue. He settled, withdrawing a handful of rooster feathers to stuff in the opening. The smell would be enough to keep Adalonda away, but even he knew that she would find some way to avoid a Rooster's call.

Adrian huffed, pulling out more feathers before cramming them down the drain, shoving them in the piping to ward off the area. Around the castle, Lutain was guiding Scamander to other passages Adalonda frequented. Skylar, Ron and Hermione had wandered off, chasing Dumbledore like waddling ducklings. It was all so cute to see, but Adrian had little care for their activities.

He needed to hurry and fill the other areas of the castle, clogging them with feathers and bedding that stank of poultry. Scamander had been raising far too many of the damned birds, although Adrian's idea was much more ambitious than simply '*letting the roosters roam free.'*

"This is ridiculous." Adrian hissed under his breath, feeling more and more asinine as he fumbled with his bag. Corralling Adalonda was impractical, but for now it was all he could do to contain her location to a single place.

The castle was waking up; Dumbledore had assured him that the other teachers wouldn't be alarmed with his presence but that was saying nothing for the countless students who had hoped him dead. Adrian didn't want to stop, afraid that he would be caught in the waves of nostalgia that threatened to drown him in his mistakes.

The sun was rising; Adrian could barely remember the last time he saw the sunset from the covered bridge, nor the company he once had.

Adrian ran through the hallways, briefly mourning the loss of his clicking boots in Remus' hallway closet. It was more practical to have solid silent footwear, although it wasn't nearly as stylish or comforting. The Cerestes cloak fluttered around his sides, his hair fluffy and washed after however long. Adrian felt foreign in his own skin, and felt dread more solidly than the wands on his arms.

The lower levels were filled with feathers, the upper levels similarly stuffed. The forest opening was broken under a landslide and similar openings met a disastrous fate. There was little left for Adalonda to venture to, Adrian imagined she had been peacefully basking in her triumph for months.

Adrian couldn't imagine a life like that, where the tainted and corrupt sat on a throne of delight and decadence. Yet, his father ruled the country, and the Potter's had morning breakfast.

Adrian didn't know how to think about that.

He felt overwhelmed that in the face of something foul, all his time would come to an end. He would be leaving soon, but he wasn't sure where he was going to go.

He still had many things left to do, he needed the wand, the stone, and the cloak.

To get the cloak he needed to destroy those objects of Skylar's, to get the stone he needed to find it and the wand as well. Mylla told him it was at Hogwarts, and knowing how fate loved to mess with Adrian so much, he would be willing to bet money on Dumbledore being involved.

Adrian had so many things to do, but he had no desire to truly act out on them.

It was a confession of his that he would never admit, the shadow he cast regardless of the source. The intrusive illogical thinking that he knew truly as he himself; some things were made to defy logic.

He wasn't avoiding responsibility. Though there was one thing he clung to. An excuse perhaps, like the traumatized child. The soul of the wretched, apathy. The belief that nothing was his fault, the belief that he couldn't change anything even if he wanted. If someone was cursed, or believed they were not at fault, then they wouldn't feel hurt when they failed. The failures he had made could never have been prevented; someone or something else would always live to make his existence hell.

Was it his fault if he couldn't overcome an adversary created to oppose him? Was it his fault if he failed facing Adalonda when all odds were against him? He would try, but would his own flaws be overlooked because he simply, *had too much damage to ever be successful.*

It was a darker thought, that Adrian always tried to ignore. The concept of destiny was foreign and wrong to him, as unwanted as the parasite in his blood.

What was the point of prophecy, if all they ever did was eat away at you from the inside.

Adrian didn't mean to.

He really truly didn't.

He was in the Headmaster's office, ignoring the portraits that leered at him openly. He sat on a stool in the corner, back to the bookshelves and the shelves that had been cleared of clutter and knick-knacks. McGonagall had truly renovated, altered the room into something different but still ancient.

Adrian didn't mean to, but when the headache began he thought it was something small so he ignored it.

Lutain noticed but said nothing, exhausted and tired from his frantic slithering to guide the older wizard to the common openings. Dumbledore was talking with the acting Headmistress in quiet tones. Skylar was writing quickly a letter, assuredly to his parents.

Adrian couldn't help but find his eye attracted to the grotesque withered flesh of Dumbledore's hand. The single ring on his finger called to Adrian like a siren's song. It felt sour but sweet, like buttermilk.

It was as black and as unsettling as a thestrals eye.

The ring was beautiful.

Adrian's head hurt.

Something opened, peeled from his flesh like a glob of gum; stretching and sticking a flower bud opened.

Adrian wheezed, a hoarse noise had him falling from his stool, the wooden legs skittering across the floor.

"Adrian!" Skylar shouted, spilling the inkwell in his haste. He sprinted, Hermione similarly reaching Adrian before any of the adults.

Hermione moved first, basic first aid forcing her to roll Adrian on his side, keeping his airways clear in case he vomited. Adrian contorted, gasping in pain. His muscles contorted against his control, moving before his hands.

"Master! Master!" Lutain cried out in stress, unable to do anything. Adrian gagged, mouth open and heaving. Snakelike in its movements.

"Stand back," Dumbledore commanded, waving his wand quickly to force the furniture away in a clear circle in the room. Adrian whined, head burning.

He felt his skin pop, a small cut carving itself open across his face.

"Blood!" Skylar warned, regretfully pulling his hands back. Hermione quickly moved away as well, careful not to touch it. Poor Headmistress McGonagall was looking very overwhelmed with the situation.

Adrian gagged, his head was *on fi-*.

'Oh you poor wretched creature,' something cooed in his head, amused and disinterested. Viewing something little with an abstract interest. Watching a kitten crawl across a road, legs broken and close to death.

Adrian's eyes flickered, moving in the grasps of something too large and too overwhelming to see. His right eye was viewing red, blood dripping from his hairline.

Adrian's eyes drifted, wobbling and darting back and forth in animalistic desperation. Flickering over the bookshelves and portraits, over Skylar's concerned face and Newt Scamander's paling expression. Scanning across Dumbledore's guarded face, down to the withered hand and the long wand in his grasp.

The ring glinted, and after that, all Adrian could think of was *agony.*

Adrian's entire body shook and trembled, looking agonizing to any observer.

Nothing could possibly compare to when Adrian's eyes rolled back in his head, leaving the bloodshot whites exposed; and he started *chuckling.*

Maybe chuckling wasn't the right word, but there was something very sinister and amused. Adrian laughed, unlike his normal dry snark.

It sent shivers down Skylar's spine, and caused Dumbledore to pale in horror.

Adrian lifted himself up, elbows cracking ominously although he seemed to ignore his own body's protest. He hoisted himself into an unsettling kneeling position, unable to raise any further given the muscle spasms in his body. Skylar could see the meat of his thighs bulging, pulsating periodically. It must have hurt excruciatingly so.

"Dumbledore." Adrian croaked out, voice higher pitch than it should have been. Adrian's eyes rolled back down, pupils dilated unevenly. The blood from a scar on his forehead was leaking downwards, spilling into the glassy membrane and down near his chin. They would have to remove the carpet in the office once everything was done with.

Adrian's mouth twisted into a grin, all teeth and gums. His lips split, cracking on the edges and dribbling more blood down his face. "Have you accepted your fate?"

Dumbledore steadied himself and responded in a very calm and cold voice, "I am afraid Tom, that it is *you* who has denied your own ramifications."

Adrian's smile twitched, faltering ever so slightly. The dazed fogged eyes drifted downwards, pausing on the wand. Hunger, desire *burned* at the sight of it.

The ring caught the light, glittering like the rot of Dumbledore's arm.

Adrian's breathing hitched, his eyes widened in alarm, and he *screamed.*

Adrian came to laying in the hospital wing, mind burning and clouded. The light hurt, making him squint against it and hiss in pain.

There were bandages wrapped around his head, making his hair stand up stiffly and awkwardly. His forehead hurt, pulsing with pain that he rarely experienced.

"What…" Adrian croaked out, wincing and stumbling upright. He was still wearing his clothing, his Cerestes cloak was hanging on the bedpost at his foot.

Lutain instantly stirred, jolting upright in alarm.

"Master!" Lutain cried out hurriedly, sounding far too frantic for Adrian's still foggy mind. *"Master we must hurry! You were diseased and-."*

"I'm always diseased." Adrian groaned out, batting his friend to the side gently so he could throw his legs over the side of the bed. There were slippers there, his shoes mysteriously vanished. Thankfully both his wands and harnesses were on the side table, he slipped them on sloppily.

"Master!" Lutain was complaining, trying his best to grab his attention, *"Master please we-."*

"Where is everyone?" Adrian blurted, realizing quite quickly that the entire Hospital Wing was *empty.* Not even the matron was there, which was alarming. Never had she abandoned her post.

"The Great Hall," Lutain explained, although he sounded incredibly anxious.

Adrian needed to head there anyways to work on his final trap for Adalonda- Merlin knows how long he had been unconscious.

Adrian ran, seeing the sun in the sky past noon. It was morning still when he checked last. This was looking very bad and he was very pressed for time.

Adrian ran, his slippers quiet. Soundless, compared to the clicking he longed for. Lutain slung around his neck, Cerestes cloak flapping with each step.

Nobody was on the staircases, or in the hallways when Adrian bolted past. He didn't know how to feel.

The Great Hall was open, the large doors propped up. Masses and masses of students stood, large swarms that neither sat at tables or listened to order. Loud whispers, panic and hysteria and above it all, Skylar Potter and Dumbledore stood where Adrian imagined an alter should be. The podium was there, and Dumbledore looked grim.

"Lutain," Adrian mumbled lowly, looking at the unexpected sight in dread. Why would all of the students be assembled? Why would they be this alarmed? Surely Dumbledore didn't *tell* them about the basilisk?

Why had nobody noticed him yet?

"You were possessed." Lutain finally explained, sounding small and timid around Adrian's throat. *"Your father is coming."*

Adrian's heart stopped.

"What." Adrian whispered, barely willing to breathe.

"I'm sorry." Lutain apologized, understanding the impact of what he said, *"they decided to stay and fight."*

Oh.

They were assembling for war.

Voices, whispers, students crying and screaming. No wonder Skylar looked so horrified on his pedestal.

Adrian shook his head, closing his eyes and breathed. He needed the hall empty so he could work, so he had enough space to work on his plan.

(If there was one thing Adrian had learned, it was that he could be bloody dramatic when he wanted to.)

"Alright Lutain," Adrian sighed under his breath, sounding exasperated to his own ears, "It's show time."

Lutain nestled closer, and prepared himself.

Adrian swept the cloak tighter, closing it formally and taking a position. He waited, listening to the voices to *hear* the conversation.

Skylar was trying to soothe them all, hands high and coaxing even as a few students shouted for his arrest. Skylar was wanted by the government, he was a villain in the eye of the people.

No, that wasn't right, Dumbledore, Skylar; they weren't on their stage for a dramatic end. This wasn't their tragedy, it was Adrian's.

Skylar managed to spot Adrian lingering in the doorway, a flash of relief flickered across his face. Adrian could have smiled, if not for the rising frustration.

He didn't want to fight his father, he didn't want to pick a side. Adrian was realizing quite quickly that he was going to be forced to.

Adrian didn't want to join the light, he didn't want to be a mindless pawn for his father. He wanted to be indifferent, neutral in the wake of chaos. Adrian didn't *want this.*

He wanted to stop Adalonda, he wanted to end whatever plague was infecting the thestrals. He wanted peace but he knew he was never destined for it.

There were those that chose their sides based on loyalty to lineage, loyalty based on the actions of

others; Adrian chose his loyalty based on the chances others took and how they utilized his trust.

The students were shouting in a panic, pushing at the front of the Great Hall. Tables were flipped, a swarm of black cloaks under the blank dread filled faces of the staff. They were children, scrambling and rolling in a mass grave at their feet.

Adrian had never seen Dumbledore look so horrible in his life.

"What are we going to do?" A girl screamed, young and Hufflepuff.

"Save us, Skylar!" A cry from the Gryffindors.

"Don't just stand there!"

"Help us *please!"*

"You-." Another voice was cut off in the swarm of students. Skylar looked like he was going to cry.

"Master?" Lutain asked, tight around his shoulders.

Adrian didn't want to be here.

(He knew he could make a show of it all.)

A final grand entrance.

Adrian met Skylar's eyes, then pointedly looked downwards at the masses in front of him. He jerked his chin back up, staring pointedly.

Skylar's eyes widened and he pulled out his wand, pointing it into the crowd unsure.

The crowd *panicked,* screaming even more and fumbling over one another.

"Do something!"

"What? I'm not Selwyn!"

Oh, perfect.

Skylar seemed to realize that as well, and cast a rather clumsy silencing ward.

Adrian inhaled, Lutain tightened, and then they exhaled.

"Lucky for you!" Adrian shouted, stomping forward like a demonic creature. He mourned his clicking boots. "That *I'm here* then!"

The crowd parted, stumbling backwards into each other as Adrian demanded the attention in the room. Scars on display, Lutain rearing like his trademark, and eyes glowing like something horrible.

Dumbledore's eyes flickered with the barest traces of amusement at Adrian's dramatic entrance.

Skylar looked relieved.

Adrian steered himself, and made his way to the front of the Great Hall.

He didn't want to do any of this, he just wanted the Hall cleared for his final stand with Adalonda.

It was time for Adrian to die.

Chapter End Notes

6 Chapters left everyone!

Link to Antithesis Artwork

Echoes

Chapter Summary

> Everywhere we go, we leave our traces after us. Footsteps, Photographs, Memories. The echoes of our lives are in how we move forward.

Chapter Notes

> This is a bit different in terms of chapter style, but hopefully it's still interesting to read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Twelve Years ago.

Skylar didn't know what it was, but there was something that always felt funny to him.

Maybe it was how his parents doted on him so much, or maybe how they always came to him a few moments before they went to his brother.

It wasn't that noticeable, except sometimes it was.

Sometimes they'd forget about Harry entirely, too busy fretting over him. Sometimes they'd grab him lunch and chop the things too big to eat and Skylar would almost be done before they scurried to grab Harry's food. His brother used to complain about it, he cried sometimes when they were in bed but he got food so it was okay, right?

Skylar didn't think much about it, his parents were the ones in charge, right?

He didn't think about it because that's how life *was.*

Harry was a good brother, he gave him some toys or the extra sweets he didn't want. Harry didn't keep him up at night, and he didn't argue when Skylar tossed and turned too much. Harry was wonderful, and held things for him when Skylar was getting his shoes on.

Harry asked him questions sometimes. Things about why his shoes were new when his weren't. Why his clothes were new when Harry hadn't gotten anything yet. Skylar didn't know the answer, and that sometimes made Harry nod.

One night they were in their room, getting ready for bed when Harry climbed over. Harry liked Skylar's sheets more than his own, that made sense because Harry's sheets had a stain from when Skylar spilled juice on the covers.

"Sky?" Harry asked quietly, Skylar said that he liked it when Harry talked quieter so it didn't hurt his ears when his head hurt. "Why do you get so many different things?"

Skylar thought and frowned. The answer was obvious to him, maybe it wasn't to Harry?

"Because I'm special!" Skylar grinned, toothy and excited.

Harry's eyes were big and green, just like their mum. Sometimes they watered, like now.

"Okay." Harry accepted quietly, fumbling with the soft blanket in his hands, "why are you special?"

Sometimes Harry stared at him. His eyes were pretty but sometimes they weren't. They looked at Skylar a lot, really hard and sometimes they didn't blink. Skylar didn't want to say anything about it because he loved his brother but sometimes when Harry looked at him hard, it scared Skylar a little.

"Mummy and Daddy said I was special." Skylar settled on happily. That made plenty of sense.

Harry blinked slowly and nodded, that made sense to him.

"Sky? Why don't Mummy and Daddy love me?"

That was a tough question. Skylar didn't know the answer, but he couldn't say that. Otherwise Harry wouldn't think Skylar knew things!

Skylar hummed and thought. "Maybe you don't smile enough?"

"Oh," Harry blinked again and tried to smile. It looked weird, his eyes were too bright an kinda creepy. "Okay, thanks Sky."

"Yeah!" Skylar grinned, patting his brother on his shoulder. Harry hopped down and walked across the room to climb into his own bed. He didn't say anything else that night.

(Skylar got his own room his next birthday once he told his Mummy and Daddy how sometimes Harry would ask him questions late at night. Sky kinda missed Harry, but now he had more room for all his toys so he didn't mind it.)

Lutain didn't know what to think of the strange human.

The human lived in a den smaller than Lutain's old den, darker with stale air. It smelled of foul rat droppings and waste. It was sick, cold and damp in a way that would surely rot the human's scales.

The human had strange eyes, bright unlike most. Beyond that Lutain couldn't imagine much more, humans all looked the same to him even through the glass.

Lutain was thankful to be free, even though his rats would not be regular anymore and it was too cold for his taste. He was crammed under the humans scales which alarmed him. He never knew humans could remove their brightly coloured scales, or exchange them for others.

This humans scales were weirdly shaped, much too large for its body and muted where others were firm. They looked like they were half torn, fringed and sticking like stuck shed.

Everything about this human was strange to him, but he owed this human his freedom. This human was unique, and it could *talk.*

Lutain never knew a human that could talk before.

"What are you doing?" Lutain asked the human curiously. Was it preparing to hunt? Lutain was hungry himself, maybe this human could provide him with a rat?

The human looked at him, small and misshapen in the dark. It was warm, bright for Lutian's heat sensing. The human looked at him with its bright eyes. It must have been a hatchling to be so small.

"Getting ready for bed?" It responded, hissing but clearly confused.

Bed? What was bed? It sounded like a strange word that Lutain didn't know.

"Bed?" Lutain echoed, interested.

"Yeah," the human agreed, pausing before it shifted the pelts and coverings from the small ledge it was sitting on, *"this is a bed. You sleep on it."*

Sleeping in a specific spot? How fascinating. Lutain always slept in the warmest spots or carefully hidden locations to help him digest his dinners.

"Warm?" Lutain asked curiously, perhaps the bed was heated as well.

The human paused, tentative as it fumbled with the coverings. *"Not really. I could...I could sleep on my side? You could lay with me and I could keep you warm? I'm sorry it isn't much...can I help you at all? Please stay."*

Lutain scrambled to comprehend what the strange human was saying. The human could *make* things warm? Lutain always had to find heat on his own. Laying on its side seemed interesting, perhaps it designated its sides based on the unnecessary amount of limbs? Where would Lutain go after? It wasn't as if this den had an easy exit, which baffled Lutain even further.

"I'm sorry I can't sneak out, my...my aunt would be really mad."

What a strange human.

Snakes didn't have to concern themselves with this level of thought, although Lutain was feeling very intrigued. He didn't know of any other speakers, maybe they were all like this? Lutain didn't know that much in truth, but he was completely willing to learn more.

Later that night the human curled on its thin fabric on its foreign bed, and it gasped out sobs like it was regurgitating its food. Its face was wet, twisted in expression Lutain imagined was only possible from its lack of scales.

Lutain watched it belt out pitiful noises in its human tongue, begging desperately perhaps. Why did it cry so? Surely it was no longer a hatchling and it was able to survive on its own, why would its sire wait for it? Why would its kin care for it?

How strange. Perhaps humans like snakes, would forget about this in a few more seasons.

(In a couple years, Harry Potter forgot it ever happened at all.)

Bellatrix Lestrange didn't know what to expect of the little boy that her husband and brother in law brought home. At first, she imagined she could use the poor little thing for target practice. At least a human child would scream and move more realistically than conjured crows or stolen dogs.

It surprised her, the sudden *boldness* of the little boy. The way its large green eyes were constantly filled with fear and dread, the way its hands shook as it peered around her home with such obvious terror. The poor thing wouldn't last a day on its own, before some silly little monster snatched it up

and wrung its neck.

...But the snake around its neck, *oh,* that was the surprise. That was the punch that rattled Bellatrix's teeth and made her vision swim. The little boy was terrified of shadows itself but was so starved of love and attention it sought the company of animals before the company of humans.

Bellatrix couldn't help but find herself enthralled by the little creature, by the small pudgy cheeks it had and the weirdly large feet on its little body. Thin frame, thick hideous glasses and wide *innocent green eyes.*

Bellatrix wanted to pluck them out, so they would stop staring at him. He looked at her like he was waiting for the knife to fall, the single curse that would take his life and he was *waiting for it.*

That wasn't fun. Bellatrix didn't want to play with tools that were ready to break themselves.

It was settling into her home, living in the small room Bella never cared much for. Her husband and brother were working around, cleaning and readying things for a new human in their midst. It bothered her a little bit, if they were so desperate to have a new pet why wouldn't they simply purchase a cat? A new dog? Bella wouldn't even kill this one.

The wide eyed knobbly child bumbled around, peeking around corners and trying to be sneaky. It was sad, truly; its footsteps were loud and its mumbling was rather aggravating. How often did it need to be let out? How often did she need to get it fresh water? Weren't little humans needing training to use the loo?

Merlin, maybe she needed to contact her dear sissy to find out all of these puzzling questions.

She muttered, scraping a knife against the kitchen table. She woke up grumpy, sour and feeling stir crazy. It wasn't her fault that wherever they grabbed the little brat from had burned down. Well, maybe it *was* partially her fault. They were wanted now, more attention drawn to them after she had been doing *wonderful* at hiding under the radar. She couldn't even go for a stroll, instead she was trapped in the house with some feral baby human while her husband and brother were off finding a new place to stay low.

Once her Lord returned...they would *all* pay.

For now, she was going to carve a crude shape into the kitchen table with a sharp knife, and wait until she could wreck a window.

The stairs creaked under weight, Bellatrix glanced up from the corner of her eye.

The young little human was slinking out, looking like a skittish alley cat. The snake was around his neck, looping down over his arm. She wondered where he had gotten a snake as pretty as that one, bright yellow bellies were pretty rare.

She had seen an array of snakes in her life, most of them fast and likely lethal. They swarmed to her lord, and she treated them all with adoration. They were beautiful creatures, although she didn't understand them. They were mindless animals, but her lord cherished them, so by default she would as well.

The boy looked at her, peering at him from the stairwell. He stared at her, eyes bright and focused. The snake flickered its tongue, the only clue that it was alive.

Bellatrix itched to curse the brat, but she still wasn't sure why exactly he had been brought to her. What *exactly* was it here for? Was she *supposed* to curse it?

"What?" She snapped back, stabbing the knife sharply into the table. It stuck there, vibrating like a tuning fork.

The boy *flinched,* a whole body shudder although it didn't run away. Skittish and easy to spook, but holding its ground for some unseeable reason. The snake shifted slightly, clinging to the boy's bony shoulders.

Bella's skin itched. Surely she wouldn't get in trouble for cursing the boy *too much.*

She stood slowly, nails scratching over the grooves she cut into the table. With a jerk, she pried the knife from the wood. The boy watched her movements carefully, not budging.

"What are *you* looking at?" She sneered, taking a jerky step forward to spook the child into skittering up a couple steps. If it had ears like a cat, they would be pressed flat to its head.

"'There's a good kitty." She grinned, taking a slow cautious step forward. Her steps were much quieter than its childish movements. It's eyes widened slightly, catching the glint from the knife.

"Why don't you come here to play?" She asked, taking another closer step. If she healed the child afterwards, she was sure the thing would be too skittish to ever speak up about what she did. She'd even be so nice to clean the bloodstains from the floor.

The boy licked its lower lip, a small tongue that Bellatrix itched to pluck out. Maybe she'd gouge out its eyes too, if only so she wouldn't have to look at those disgusting glasses.

"'No." It spoke, voice soft and quiet and very unsteady. Bold, but quiet.

Bellatrix stilled, tilting her head slightly to the side in amusement. So it could talk after all? How interesting.

"Don't you want something to do?" She asked with a wicked grin, "you've been *watching* me."

The little boy twitched, looking ready to bolt up the stairs again.

"...You're the mad lady." The child croaked out, voice airy and high pitched like all snotty nosed brats, "...Bellatrix Lestrange."

Bella *grinned,* "so you *do* know me!"

The boy's eyes widened further, looking more panicked than before. Perhaps he didn't like how excited she was to hear that he knew her? She liked being recognizable, it made people cry at the sight of her.

"Stay back." The boy warned, voice warbling in its obvious fear. It's eyes were wet, glassy on the edges.

"Oh!" She gaped in delight, "are you going to cry? *Ickle little kitten gonna cry?"*

The boy's face twitched, lower lip shifting ever so slightly. It was inching backwards, hand against the wall as it traced the railing.

Bellatrix took one step forward, and the boy breathed heavily. Not hyperventilating, but looking on the verge of some idiotic decision.

Bellatrix was curious what a little brat was capable of doing.

"I'm going to gut you," Bellatrix whispered, loving the way the little boy paled into something ghostly. It's eyes were pinpricks, adrenaline causing it's miniature fingers to twitch and flutter.

The snake hissed, lifting into a small twig of an opponent. Bellatrix Lestrange knew better than to test the speed of an unidentified snake, especially one that seemed so intelligent.

She could pull her wand to shield her one side to deflect the snake, but it would be far too obvious what she was doing. It was unlikely the boy would be able to do anything about it anyways.

Maybe *this* was the challenge her husband brought. A fun little game; get past the snake and slaughter the child.

"Aren't you cute." Bellatrix cooed, finding the challenge very exciting. "A pretty little boy like you."

The boy's nostrils flared, looking far too terrified and brave to ever survive in a house with her. What a pity, she always wished her toys would last longer.

She lifted the knife, eyeing the snake as she twisted into a prepared position.

The boy shifted, jerking his shoulder out with the snake leading. The small reptile reared back, hissing and spluttering in a way that would make another pause. Bellatrix had seen Nagini, she had fed the massive creature severed arms. She didn't pause at the small ribbon of an animal.

The snake lunged, she smacked the thing sideways near its neck. It deflected off course, as surprised as the boy was.

The knife glinted, the boy threw his hands up in alarm before he opened his mouth.

Bellatrix loved how they screamed.

The boy's eyes changed, somehow shifting. The pinprick black of its pupil dilated rapidly into a thick black circle with a green rim. It shuddered, and suddenly Bellatrix's hand *snapped.*

She stumbled away, dropping the knife from twisted fingers. A surge of heat through her arm; dislocated fingers and one fractured pinky.

She felt the joints, snapping the cartilage like the neck of a small rodent. The snake had recovered by then, coiling around protectively. The boy was breathing heavy, eyes pinpricks once again. The knife forgotten on the floor.

Bellatrix slowly looked at the boy, holding the bruising joints that she didn't care much for.

"You…" She trailed off, straightening the joints once more, just to make sure they were bending right. "...you *dislocated* my fingers?"

The boy crossed one arm in front of him, chest heaving. Protective, wary of what she would do next.

How fascinating, how absolutely *fascinating.* Did the boy somehow charm the snake itself? Did he control it somehow?

"You were going to stab me." The boy choked back, sounding defensive and terrified. The tremor was back. "You were going to *stab me."*

He had dislocated her fingers, nearly breaking them. Without a word, faster than she could see.

It was magic, it could only be. But *careful magic,* able to target the hand around the knife and *only that.* Purposeful, controlled.

"Of course I was." Bellatrix sniffed, huffing as the boy looked even *more* unsettled. "I was *bored."*

The boy's neck moved in a nervous anxious swallow. How precious.

"Can you do it again?" Bella asked, eyes flickering to the knife, "do I need to stab you *again?"*

The boy balked, shaking his head quickly.

"I- *maybe?"* he croaked out, chewing on his lower lip, "I- I don't know."

"Do it." Bella snapped out, grin faltering. What use was a toy that didn't *surprise her?*

The boy's eyes flickered over the room, barely willing to stay away from her longer than a moment. Smart of him.

The boy's face twitched, eyes wet and stressed.

Bella huffed after a few seconds, lunging forward at the child unexpectedly.

The snake recoiled, ready to strike. The boy's eyes widened in alarm and he jerked back, one arm raised between them.

The crack this time was audible; loud, crunching through her bones and body and sending her jerking to the ground.

Bellatrix Lestrange wheezed on the ground, clenching her jaw through the unexpected flare. She had certainly experienced worse, but the surprise of it had caught her off guard.

She tilted her neck, cracking it to relieve the pressure. There was nothing she could do for the shattered fingers and likely broken arms until her husband returned.

"Oh, aren't you precious." She cooed back, ignoring the way her hands twisted into gnarled things.

The boy's eyes widened, a flush swelling high in his cheeks. The boy looked away, sheepish and bashful. Oh, that was interesting.

"You're *perfect,"* she coed, watching his reactions in delight. "I like you, I'm going to *keep you,* my ickle little *present.* You're *perfect."*

The boy *choked,* an audible wet gasping noise. Eyes wide as if struck, flush getting darker. Its hands shook, overwhelmed at the praise.

"Really?" It whispered, looking on the verge of leaning forward to soak in the praise.

How precious.

"I like you," Bellatrix crooned, a small grin spreading across her face. The boy looked like a flower, soaking up adoration and affection. "Can you make me happy? Can you destroy the table?"

The boy was swaying, eyes wide and starstruck, he hadn't looked away from her.

"You like me?" He whispered, more to himself than anything else. "You aren't going to get rid of me?"

Oh, what a poor poor kitten.

"I think you're *wonderful,"* she cooed, resisting the urge to claw its hair and tug its scalp, "break my table."

The boy's eyes flared, it swayed in vertigo and disorientation.

Crack.

How desperate to please.

This was better than another toy to throw curses at.

Rodolphus knew he should have killed the child, just to spare the hassle of keeping it alive. His brother agreed with him, watching with frowns as Bella coddled the boy like it was something precious.

Maybe it was precious, or something different all together.

It took a strange sort, to swoon and grin wide in delight when getting your severed arm reattached.

Bella always was strange with her affection, but this kid was warped even more.

The child, Adrian Selwyn, was something fascinating to watch.

A pet project, created and growing like a tumor. Something malignant on its own, developing into a single moment in which he would destroy everything Dumbledore had ever accomplished.

A martyr for the light, a symbol of peace. The truth of all the man's lies, the object of public faith and hope. Grown from nothing into the greatest threat; Dumbledore's greatest mistake.

It was interesting to see the child grow, to see him develop into something warped and distorted from the smallest signs of human decency. The lengths he would go for praise, the limits he would surpass for a single confirmation of his duty.

The boy would sever his own leg for a moment of affection. He had never seen an example of a human so starved, so *desperate.*

If his plans fell through, simply revealing how traumatized and damaged the boy was would be satisfying itself.

He was strong too, that perhaps was the most interesting sight. An experiment years in the making, destroying the concepts of ethics and morals to fashion a boy into the shape he wanted.

Bellatrix had raised him proper, feeding him the barest touches of love and companionship after acts of horror. Desensitizing him into something comfortable in pain and gore. Raising him along a snake, normalizing animalistic tendencies and thought patterns.

The boy was interesting- he had the makings to be someone intelligent but the continuous stunted social interaction had quelled that. Only in a few areas did the boy shine, thankfully all in areas of little threat or interest. He would gladly pander to these strange obsessions, crafting a false sense of security and kinship through whatever odd connections the boy made.

What hassle was it to have one of his men fetch a skull or claw? How much effort to obtain little

pesky treasures in exchange of thoughtless and utter loyalty.

The boy was willing to throw his flesh at his feet, and felt love the moment he cursed his flesh until it *burned.*

The screams of suffering, the laughter of pleasing him.

What a wonderful little self destructive monster he made.

He would be socially ostracized, set apart from others his age due to his face. Isolated from his lack of social comprehension. Desperate for affection, aggressive from his rearing. Forever stumbling over his deep seated loathing for Skylar Potter, willing to die for his revenge.

In the end of it all, the boy would be something so loyal to his cause and his devotion, that he would never be a threat. If that ever occurred, he had marked the child as his own. He would always find the little vermin, tracking him down from the outrageously large mark on his skin or the trace he left in his mind. An accident of course, but if he ever felt too threatened he could always tear apart the boy with torture, leaving him empty and drooling. His soul would be protected forever in a lifeless shell, captured in a moral issue.

His only threat would ever be Dumbledore, and the man would *never* kill an innocent boy in vain for a greater cause. Perhaps he would create a situation with his old manipulations, but the blatant slaughter of a defenseless child?

Never, and so, he had finished it..

The prophecy didn't matter, because in one smooth motion he had completely and utterly, won.

Snape *hated* teaching potions to the Gryffindor and Slytherin students.

He adored his Slytherins, they were all steller students and capable of extraordinary things. Aligned next to Gryffindor idiots, it turned his classroom into a war zone.

He knew his Godson Draco was the cause of much of the aggression, but he couldn't address this blatantly. He would talk to the boy after class in private, until then, Snape was confined to a single room with not only *one* headache, but *multiple.*

Neville Longbottom was capable of melting a cauldron while *boiling water.* Ron Weasley was so daft, it was a mystery how the boy hadn't killed anyone prior. Hermione Granger was a know-it-all that went out of her way to bask in the idiocy of her fellow peers. Skylar Potter was the *worst.*

He loved Lily, he truly did, but he would *never* forgive her for spawning an absolute *oaf of a child.*

He could handle those four if it weren't for the black sheep of his own house, the lazy excuse of a *Slytherin.*

Adrian Selwyn was a walking disaster.

The boy was quiet, observant in a lazy dazed way. The scars were obvious, often making his features look more ghoulish than normal with the dim light of the potions classroom. Perhaps that was why his partner, Theodore Nott, often threw glances at him. Even Snape felt sickened when he looked at the boy.

He couldn't imagine the agony the child went through, but he had suspicions that the curse

somehow left him *brain damaged.*

The child barely did homework, what he *did* do was pathetic and sloppy. His essays were late, he overslept constantly. He ate like a starving dog and looked equally as sloppy. Snape was beginning to suspect the boy was abusing cleaning charms in exchange for actually bathing like a civilized human being.

Whenever the boy sat on the aisle seat with Skylar Potter nearby, it almost exponentially increased the disasters in the room.

For some reason unconfirmed, all of his Slytherin students were *terrified* of Selwyn. Snape had run countless security scans over the boy, searching for dark artifacts or weapons. He only ever detected the curse scar, which was a threat in itself. That, and the *blasted snake.*

If it wasn't for the Headmaster's assurances that the serpent was a "Traumatic-therapy-assistance-animal," Snape would have the ruddy creature *burned.*

He had to deal with serpents enough with the Dark Lord, he didn't want to have to deal with them in his classroom also.

Skylar Potter seemed far too chipper, trying to bridge the gap between Gryffindor and the single Slytherin student. His efforts were amusing, as they almost always failed. For how often Adrian Selwyn and Skylar Potter interacted, it was obvious that Adrian Selwyn absolutely loathed the Golden Boy.

Snape couldn't figure out *why,* especially with the alarmingly powerful Legilimency barriers on the boy's mind. He suspected they were trauma-constructed; made from memories selectively forgotten in the heat of torture. Bellatrix Lestrange was a foul and insane lady, it was a marvel the boy survived at all.

(Severus Snape suspected that the boy lied about that as well, it was impossible to ever be *reared* by that lady. Likely lying for attention.)

If Severus Snape had a choice, he would expel the useless Selwyn brat at the soonest convenience. It was a pain that the boy *exceeded* at Care for Magical Creatures, otherwise he could have presented a case and had the lethargic waste removed from his dungeons.

Until then, Snape was perfectly content ignoring the brat who was determined to ghost his way through his Hogwarts years with pathetic grades, and equally pathetic work effort.

Adalonda was utterly surprised and delighted the moment the small creature, Cerestes, came to her.

Begging for power, knowledgeable and ignorant all at once. Proud of his inferior skill with magical creatures; certain that his rudimentary information would somehow protect him.

Desperate for love, leaning on those to help carry the weight of his troubles. Obvious with his flaws, so innocently trusting in anything loyal to his cause.

What a poor poor pitiful creature, created and destroyed over years before she even met it. Generally it would take years to reach this level of chaos, this level of potential *disaster.*

He leaned on only one other, talking about them fondly and with indecisive trust. He could confide in her, he could ruin her work by mentioning things that tasted *wrong*.

Adalonda knew this other human would be no threat to her; if push came to shove she could easily worm her ideas into Cerestes' skull until he turned against the world in animalistic rage. She could rewrite the mind of this lesser little insect, and see what would happen with her subtle prompting.

It had been a long, *long* time.

And Adalonda was very bored.

This Cerestes, well. She always wondered if she could drive a human so mad, reality was no longer recognizable.

Remus didn't know what to think of the boy when he opened the door and stepped inside.

He had been warned by Sirius; the things Adrian had said, the things he did.

Remus could barely recognize the boy he once knew and invited into his office. It had been years since then, years and he had done nothing.

He couldn't help the guilt, but he could help now.

He could help now if he understood *why.*

He opened the door and slipped inside. Everything was soft, rounded corners and pale in colour. It smelled sterile, blunted over what actually happened.

Remus couldn't believe it, he couldn't believe what James and Sirius desperately told him the moment he returned. He couldn't imagine it, until he had seen the damage himself and looked at the records of Headmistress Umbridge's death.

He couldn't believe it until he saw the recorded and documented death of Luna Lovegood.

But it didn't make any *sense.*

From what Remus knew, Adrian Selwyn's only friend *was* Luna Lovegood. Remus had taught her as a second year, he certainly remembered the odd yet thrilling charisma of the girl. She was kind, she even brought him chocolates and referred to him fondly. It didn't make any sense.

And the rest of the information? That Adrian Selwyn was a *parselmouth* and apparently controlled a *basilisk?* The monstrous creature that Salazar Slytherin had locked away in an *imaginary chamber* was suddenly real and had *murdered someone?*

(Adrian Selwyn had *killed someone?*)

No, no that didn't line up. The boy Remus knew was in a difficult situation, but eager to please and dying to impress. He had expectations pressed on him that overwhelmed the boy and linked him to something sad. Once the year was over, Remus had been debating taking the child to another mind healer to determine if the boy wasn't only curse-damaged, but also depressed or anxious. It would explain the sudden plummet in his grades towards the end of the year, especially with no obvious cause.

Remus had suspected that *something* happened with the impostor the year earlier. Adrian had taken many detentions with the hidden death eater, perhaps the man had...*done something* to the boy, traumatized him further and triggered this slow deterioration.

Adrian wouldn't have done this, he *wouldn't have done this.*

Adrian would have bitten off his own fingers to make Remus proud of him, although that had taken a long time to get to. The boy had stumbled over words, confessing half-truths that Remus could hear the instant he confessed to living with Bellatrix Lestrange. There was more to the story but he never pressed because Adrian Selwyn was *abused.*

Adrian Selwyn had whispered under his breath over and *over,* that he was useful. Trying to assure himself, trying to promise himself.

He wouldn't *snap* and kill someone when he was so pressured to do the *right thing.*

(From the small confessions and half smiles, Luna Lovegood was his anchor. He wouldn't do this.)

The boy in front of him, curled up in a pale blanket on a pale bed, looked like he maybe would.

He had never seen Adrian look so maddened. He looked like the prisoners from Azkaban, twitching on the cusps of something violent. Asleep apparently, but not restful. His blankets were bloodstained, scabs around his cuticles. His face was pale, waxy and unwashed. Remus doubted the boy had been let out in a long while, or had seen the sun in weeks.

Adrian was looking sick, grieving and mourning even unconscious. Scarfing down food but not gaining weight. Did the stress of the situation somehow compromise his immune system? Was the curse-scar activating now that he was at his weakest?

He hadn't laughed, Sirius said. He hadn't laughed and instead he stared at walls like they talked to him. He wallowed, curling on the bed or in the corners when he could. Lashing out viciously without actions. Spitting venom, staring at his hands numb and detached. Sirius wanted to have a mind healer come in to see if the boy was experiencing dissociative episodes.

(They *couldn't* have one come in, now with Adrian wanted as a suspect for a *double murder.*)

Could they give him medicine? Potions for depression? Not with how something was clearly wrong with him, not with how his limbs shook and he stared wide eyed at nothing. Haunted, something murdering him slowly.

Adrian looked like he had the world and he lost it without ever realizing what he had.

Sirius told him that the boy hadn't even responded to praise or other signs of affection. He recoiled at physical contact, finding basic human decency somehow *wrong.*

He didn't know small talk, or casual conversation. He was fascinated with small things that was general knowledge; famous toys from when Skylar was a child, music bands, even trademark sweets. He had a large gap in his memory or perhaps he wasn't experienced with it at all.

(Merlin, growing up with *Bellatrix Lestrange.*)

Remus sat on the softened chair, looking at Adrian Selwyn's small sleeping form in nothing more than a cell block.

Remus was going to have to tell Sirius to spell all plates and utensils unbreakable.

(Remus was terrified what Adrian Selwyn would do with broken ceramic, loneliness, and overwhelming utter loss.)

"I'm not afraid of dying anymore." Adrian confessed in a whisper, talking out loud although Newt

Scamander knew that he wasn't supposed to hear it. "I'm not afraid of it. It's hard to be afraid when I'm...I'm *so tired,* of being afraid. I'm sad now."

Adrian smiled, tracing a single finger along the condensation on a window. "I'm sad now, and I don't even know why anymore."

Newt Scamander had seen many terrible things, but something about Adrian Selwyn shook him to his core.

Tonks loved Adrian.

She loved him *so so much.*

(Sometimes, watching him keel over and vomit blood into a snowbank; she wished he had died as a child to be spared of all his suffering.)

A lifetime ago

She knew, that words were always small things.

Translated emotions to express to another. They were always inconsistent, broken and fraying on the edges.

She knew, as she talked gently with cues and whispers, that sometimes words were so very important.

It was the little things that people remembered, the half muttered promises in the stairwells. The laughing under lantern light. The shrieking delight near windows and sniffles by the courtyard. Somethings would always stand out in memory, like photographs repeated over and over until that's all you knew.

She knew when she was talking, when her words were important. When the moment was perfect and she knew she could change everything.

These exchanges were the ones she'd remember, because they hurt oh how they hurt.

She talked, hoping that maybe she wouldn't have to be afraid of hearing others' condolences. She talked, hoping that maybe she wouldn't have to go buy a black dress. She talked, hoping that *maybe,* she could imagine him *happy.*

He talked and she talked and she wanted to cry.

It was so cold, and she loved their bridge but it scared her so much.

"Well...you see.." she trailed off, feeling cold and knowing that *this,* this was what he would remember in a dozen years.

He looked at her. He looked grotesque and burning and one day he would burn himself out; she never knew when it was but there was one thing she could say and she would say however many times he needed.

"What is it Luna?" He asked, and he looked so, *so tired.*

"You're not unlovable, silly." She smiled, because if she didn't, she thought that she would cry. "Because I love you."

Our memories demand attention, they demand us to remember and watch them over and over.

Sometimes they are not nice, sometimes they are cruel, and vicious, and they hunt in our minds like wolves after a kill. Sometimes they ambush us in dark corners, ensnaring us and leaving us a bloodied mess. We can't ignore our past, we can't pretend our memories don't haunt us.

When we know this, when we can look at our histories and the echoes of who we were to ourselves and who we were to others, and... Sometimes I can't tell what's real and what isn't, what happened and what didn't.

I can't simply move on, but it's my choice to try and try and keep trying to walk away and emerge something new from my broken life.

Chapter End Notes

5 Chapters Left

Link to Antithesis Artwork

Denial

Chapter Summary

> The 5 Stages of Grief: DENIAL
> You may think life makes no sense, has no meaning and is too overwhelming. You start to deny reality, and in effect, go numb. You exist in a state of shock because life as you once knew it has changed irreversibly. You deny what the world has given you, because it is too damaging to comprehend.
>
> (Where Skylar faces mortality, Lutain and Nagini were once family, and Adalonda in the end, was poison to us all.)

Chapter Notes

> Alright. It took me forever to determine how this chapter should go, and in all honesty this was the best way I could rationalize it. The most symbolic way for this to go down, the most meaningful vindictive way to satisfy everyone.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was something in Nagini that felt wrong and broken. Something twisted and mutilated and tugged on her innards like a bird tugging on her tail. She didn't know what it was, she didn't question it, but she knew it was wrong.

She knew it when she woke, and her master was screaming in fury, burning in her head and making her body prickle in pain. She knew that it was something horrible when he *screamed* for his underlings, filing the estate with bodies that reeked of sweat. She knew there was something terribly wrong when humans flocked and swarmed in numbers she never imagined.

Nagini had a sense of hope still, that perhaps it was not to such extremes yet. Perhaps it was not the single idea which filled her with dread so thick she hesitated to move.

"Nagini," her master hissed at her, furious and shrieking in his human skin and bloodied eyes. *"Go kill that boy's mongrel bird!"*

Nagini tried to ignore that anything was wrong when she struck, pulling the white feathered creature into her coils. She tried to ignore that it was anything to do with the child she sometimes considered hers.

The bird stilled, the one her master's hatchling fed treats and cared for gently. Nagini tried to ignore the way her stomach turned, when she murdered what Cerestes left behind when he fled.

Nagini knew in the world of the predators and prey, that the child she was so fond of would never be a predator to her.

She never thought that she would have to look at him, and label him as prey.

What Cerestes' beauty had created was demolished by his actions; Nagini understood the former that Cerestes was a predator, and from the latter Nagini accepted that he was now prey.

Hadn't her master always told Nagini, that *she* were not a mindless animal no longer?

Was sentience a curse, or a promise of morality itself?

Her master told her the day he saved her, the day he brought her warmth and brought her meaning, *"You become responsible forever for what creature you have tamed."*

She would not forget the day she had her life given to her.

Cerestes was a creature wild and heartless according to her master- he had betrayed them all like something feral.

She had tamed him, and she had tamed Lutain.

"You become responsible forever for what creature you have tamed."

Skylar Potter held his breath, closed his eyes, and prayed.

Dumbledore had contacted the Order, gathered their forces. The students had rallied together, evacuating those too young to fight.

The armour clanged and walked, the bridges broke underfoot and crumbled into the ravine below. Skylar tried to ignore the way Adrian stood alone on the broken bridge, looking like Icarus ready to flap his wings and soar.

The sky was overcast but starting to clear. They would have sunshine soon.

"Okay Lutain," Skylar began with a hoarse noise in his throat. Everything in his body *screamed* to get away from the creature wrapped around his throat. "You know the plan? Squeeze if you- okay yes not so tight."

The snake slackened and burrowed closer.

Adrian had run off after giving his familiar to Skylar with a pointed look. *Take care of him.* Skylar would.

Newt Scamander was assisting him; the last Skylar saw of the man he had a dozen buckets and House Elves chasing him like madness. The Great Hall was apparently now off limits, which was fine as far as Skylar was concerned.

Ron and Hermione had run off, apparently Dumbledore had located the last Horcrux and now they were scrambling to gather them all accordingly, all the while working under the confusion of Adrian's own deluded goals. Skylar was standing in the main courtyard, trying to smile at the students who knew they were likely going to die.

The had Dumbledore (the crippled man who wouldn't live to Summer), Adrian Selwyn (a monster luring a monster), and Skylar Potter (a fake, an impostor) all facing against the Dark Lord and the world itself.

Skylar knew that this sunshine would maybe be his last, but he would draw warmth from it if he could.

Owls were circling above them, watching and waiting.

The wards were enacted and glowed like a Dreamless Sleep potion. The snow stopped falling, protecting them.

"It's great to have you back, mate." Dean Thomas confessed, standing near Skylar with a grimace across his face. Skylar didn't remember the boy having a scar near his eyebrow before.

"Thanks," Skylar choked out uncertain, nearly jumping when a new student stomped to stand at his side. Skylar glanced over and felt hot shame when he didn't recognize the thin faced boy. He certainly would have remembered that sneer and glare before, aimed out at nothing.

"Nott," the boy curtly introduced himself, "I wasn't going to help your bloody arse 'till I saw him."

The boy nodded to Skylar, confusing the boy until he remembered the snake coiled around his throat. Skylar gulped, and Nott huffed.

"I owe Selwyn a lot," the boy deadpanned, "we all know the world is going to shite anyways. I don't see any of us making it, and I can't live knowing it may have been my bloody fault."

"It wasn't-," Skylar started before cutting off at the single look the boy gave him.

"You don't know my life, Potter." The boy cut out, sharp and sour. "You don't know what I did or said, and you don't know what I never did. I got to carry that on me, so I'm trying to make amends for it. Plus, I always wanted to curse Malfoy."

A pause, Skylar's breathing shuddered.

"Right." Thomas sighed, trying to soothe over how uncomfortable everything felt, "any idea on time?"

Skylar smiled thinly, and the entire barrier rumbled like thunder.

The ground under them quaked, the walls of the castle groaned behind them.

"About now," Skylar apologized, not daring to look behind him. "I'm so sorry for all of this."

"Nah," Thomas rolled his shoulders, "you were a good mate, Sky."

Skylar guessed that was all he could have been.

The barrier cracked, spells flew, and charms were fired. The Order was there, dueling and hexing in the battle.

Skylar didn't look when Lutain struck from his shoulder, impacting someone tall and lean and snarling like a dog. Lutain seemed gleeful, Skylar only felt sick.

He was the decoy, giving time as Dumbledore and Ron and Hermione hurried against a clock that worked against them like a monster.

It was only the first wave, and already Skylar could see students falling and crying. Sirius was there, only a short glimpse of him as a large black dog sprinted over the stones towards somewhere that needed defending.

Skylar wondered if his parents were there, if they were defending too.

He dueled, shielding and smiling as students he tutored sent patronus against the dementors spiraling above them.

Some sort of weight shifted, then the Dementors were screaming inhumane noises of dismay. Owls were diving like magpies, cruel and sharp. Large black beasts interspersed, long claws kicking and tearing against the thin wraith bodies of the Dementors.

Skylar blurted a curt laugh of surprise as thestrals- *thestrals,* were chasing away Dementors like patronus themselves. The large grotesque horses were quick, not quite so acrobatic but sufficing in numbers and ability to land and mow down Death Eater ranks with their long fangs and claw tipped hooves.

A thestral landed near Skylar, snorting loudly and tossing its long-mangled hair. It looked at him with blank white eyes, an unpainted marble. It stared at him, nearly stealing the breath from his lungs, then its head swung back into the fray and madness. It walked off, slow and calm as if the chaos around it didn't matter at all.

Lutain tightened, people *screamed,* and a large snake was there.

Lutain remembered that scent from anywhere, and he remembered that beautiful pattern along her back like it was a fact.

"Nagini!" Lutain cheered, both delighted and in dismay. Nagini advanced slowly, cautiously yet with all the grace of a predatory animal.

Skylar noticed his movements and turned to look, not at all as seamless as the two of them once more. Lutain knew better than to ever connect like that again; even at risk of his own death.

"Lutain." Nagini addressed, pausing to rear high enough to send people screaming. Lutain could hear the conflict in her voice, the way it paused unsure. *"Master said that I am to kill you."*

Lutain's heart strangled itself and he flicked his tongue. *"I thought as much."*

Nagini paused, tail twitching slightly. Lutain could feel the pulse of Skylar throb quickly under his belly.

"I'm sorry for this all." Lutain apologized wholeheartedly. *"I wanted to kill Adalonda."*

Nagini paused in surprise, *"the basilisk? Of what transgression!"*

"Monstrosity!" Lutain defended himself viciously. The level of his rage easily took Nagini off guard, *"that worm has been nothing but chaos! She has destroyed everything! She broke my master! She broke your master! She wants us to slaughter each other because she is bored!"*

Nagini looked alarmed, confused, and hesitant.

"She is something rotten," Lutain confessed quietly, *"I am a fool to have ever trusted her."*

"She…" Nagini struggled audibly, even her body was tense in confusion, *"she...hurt? Cerestes?"*

Lutain hissed wordlessly before he clarified, *"She made him sick in mind. She fed him diseased meat and watched sickness spread."*

Nagini paused before she twisted unsure, *"I... I do not want to kill you."*

"I do not want to kill you either." Lutain confessed equally ashamed, *"Adalonda will kill me. She needs to die, she hurt my master."*

Nagini lowered herself slowly, then looked around unsure.

Obviously, that was when the wall exploded behind them.

Humans screamed, stiffening and dropping like insects. Skylar inhaled sharply, scrambling to the ground mindless of Nagini's nearby body. Something heavy hit the ground with a ferocious noise of wordless anger. Lutain felt his body stiffen in instinctual fear.

"Maggots!" Adalonda, the queen of all serpents, screamed. *"Maggots all of you! Worthless wastes of my time! Where is he! Where is Cerestes!"*

Lutain kept his eyes averted, he could hear the screams of humans in the vibrations in the air. He could smell the adrenaline and fear spike. Nagini kept motionless, horrified.

"Where is he!" Adalonda *screamed,* all pleasantries of her voice washed away behind a guttural outburst of bloodlust. *"I will tear him limb from limb and make him watch!"*

"She is madness." Nagini whispered in realization, as if all lies were washed away in a gentle rain. It was then, that the giant creature caught sight of Skylar and Lutain.

"You!" Adalonda screeched, the ground vibrating and shaking under the movement of her scales. *"I will bring him your bones!"*

Lutain tightened his scales, and Skylar took the cue as if they were one.

Skylar lifted and bolted in a sprint, careful not to look behind him as Lutain kept his focus on scent marking and heat signature. Adalonda crashed around them, stone pillars breaking and suits of armor crumpling like foil. Many people would be dying today.

"Where is he! Where is that worthless rat you dare protect! I will slaughter him!"

"Adalonda, Great Queen, no!" Nagini interrupted, lifting herself boldly to stop the chasing serpent. Skylar kept running, Lutain opened his maw to shriek at her *no.*

"I ask of you to explain-,"

Adalonda glanced over Nagini's body and without hesitation, closed her maw downwards and severed Nagini's skull from her ribs.

"No!" Lutain screamed afterwards, even as his mind told him that Nagini had perished. He knew it, and yet he screamed. *"No!"*

They passed indoors, Skylar shouting something in a language Lutain couldn't focus enough to process, and they descended steps.

Lutain spotted his master on a stairwell, unknowing- oblivious of it all.

He didn't know what Nagini had done for- he didn't-

"No." Lutain repeated dumbly.

He wondered, if this was how his master felt over the human girl he never forgot.

"Cerestes!" She screamed, and Adrian knew that she had seen him, that she had smelled his scent and now she was hunting.

Adrian ran.

His feet moved, his lungs forced air in and out *faster and faster,* and he ran.

Lutain was absent from him, a weight around his neck that didn't hold him back. He felt weightless, free and fluid as he sprinted up steps and across hallways. He could hear the crashing sound of scales on flooring, the ancient castle moaning as tapestries tore and rock crumbled.

Adrian ran, his feet barely touching the ground like all the birds he had watched before. He threw his head back, laughing a single sound of exhilaration to chase the fear from out of his heart.

Adrian had always had death beckoning him, but he had never experienced it chasing him.

Adrian *ran,* running and forcing himself to move forward. To keep going and *never* look back. If he looked back, he would die. If he looked back, then he would be facing a monster that he knew he could never overcome.

Adrian threw open the doors to the Great Hall, running through them as if it was his first day all over again. He could remember it; how young and naive he was. The sorting hat standing on its little stool in the center, the rows of children and teachers and the bright smell of the Welcoming Feast.

Now, the room was empty and barren. No illuminated candles, only large buckets of soapy water and other cleaning solutions. The reek of ammonium, the scunge of dirt on the floor.

The room was dim but bright, sunlight tinted darkly through the large stained-glass windows. Adrian always thought the Great Hall looked like a church, that there should be some sort of pew or altar on the far end where the Headmaster stood to deliver their speech.

Adrian gagged, exhaustion burning across his skin as he keeled over, hands on his knees to catch his breath. It burned.

"You cannot run," Adalonda crooned, finally slowing her deathly pursuit. She slithered into the

hall like a queen, the large door finally sliding shut as the last of her tail slipped inside. Adrian knew he wouldn't be opening that door. It closed with a noise that felt like a clap, the applause for his final act.

"Well," Adrian gurgled from where he keeled over, a room away from the majestic serpent, "I managed to run here."

Adalonda looked calm, confident, and furious. Her eyes were wide, bright glowing yellow like a full moon. The murkiness was gone, the killing sight ineffective against another basilisk.

"Oh, thank god," Adrian's voice cracked in relief, "It would be a bit of a downer if your face killed me now."

Adalonda hissed a large abrupt noise, inhaling so fiercely her entire bulk expanded by nearly a foot.

"I will kill you, you insolent brat!" Adalonda spat in delight. *"I have torn you down to nothing!"*

Adrian laughed out of disbelief, "really? *Really?* Adalonda, I gave you all of me and now I am *nothing.* But you know what? *I'm still standing!"*

Adalonda hissed in frustration, scenting and breathing sharply.

Adrian's eyes hurt.

"That's right." Adalonda spat out, lowering her head to stalk towards him predatorily, *"you are nothing compared to me. You are a child, a blind useless child that had dreams so large they could only be obtained in death."*

Adrian took a step back, shuffling around the Hufflepuff table. "That won't work on me anymore, Adalonda. There are more things in life than your fucked-up philosophy."

"Oh," Adalonda almost cheered, *"the rat finally shows its fangs? The vermin finally scrambling amongst the filth?"*

Adrian almost laughed, instead he choked.

Adalonda reared back, so tall her head nearly touched the ceiling of the hall. *"Oh yes! How pathetic you are! If only you could see what a miserable mess you were, begging for my aid and idiotic enough to accept it. I have ruined many humans, I had wrecked the lives of so many but you, Cerestes, are the greatest blunder of them all."*

Adrian shook his head and stumbled backwards, gagging on the smell of ammonia which burned his nose. "No, you're full of shite, Adalonda. And you know what? I'm sorry for you, that you lost to Mylla and you had to-."

"Do not talk to me about that wretched worm!" Adalonda *screamed,* flashing her long teeth as her breaths heaved in frustration. *"She is nothing! A diseased creature that is so foul it shall never be allowed to die!"*

"No! That's your greatest flaw!" Adrian shouted back, coughing into his hand. "You think you're so high and mighty! You're just as here as the rest of us! You're not immortal!"'

"I am a basilisk!" Adalonda *screamed.*

Adrian *laughed,* and she roared in frustration.

"'I have ruined you!" She continued in the throes of rage. *"I have taken your life and I have ruined you! I have destroyed all you hold precious, I have rotted everything you considered beautiful! You are a foul bastardized creature now who is so sick even monsters shy from your touch!"*

Adrian shook his head, a smile still spreading across his face. His eyes *hurt,* and from what he could see, the bright yellow gaze of Adalonda's eyes were now turning orange.

"No, you're wrong!" Adrian hoarsely shouted at her, "If you really ruined me, I wouldn't be here!"

Adalonda stared at him, fuming, before she started to move.

It wasn't fast. It was slow, a slow predatory lurching movement that had Adrian stumbling backwards the best he could. Adrian ascended the steps to the staff table, trying to remain as far out of reach of the giant basilisk as he could.

"You're so confident." Adalonda hissed out, keeping her mouth open to gape at air, *"you believe you have me beat? You diseased rot. You can't attack me; my scales are too strong. My strike is too fast. Even now, I am decades older and wiser than you will ever be you pathetic maggot. You will die, and I will live and lead this world into chaos because none can oppose me, lest of all you."*

Adrian shook his head, and Adalonda *laughed.*

"You think you have a chance!" She chortled in delight. *"I have always been a step ahead of you. The girl you left to rot in my chamber? I struck her and turned her into those blasted birds to render you forever tormented."*

Adrian twitched, "Ginny. You...you *bit* Ginny, so she'd be a thestral."

"Of course, I did you silly thing," Adalonda laughed. *"I bit the other girl too. She begged to live, she begged me to help you and I did by rendering you to insanity. She wanted you to be saved, so I assured your death."*

Adrian's heart lurched at the mention of Luna. He bowed his head, squinting his eyes and clenching his mouth shut. His skin burned, everything hurt.

"You trusted me, confided in me, and I put poison in your veins." Adalonda thrummed in delight, hissing vindictively in a way Adrian had never heard. *"I slaughtered that worm you once held dear, and once I am done with you I will slaughter that serpent you carry around obsessively."*

Lutain, she meant Lutain.

Adrian felt his eyes water, liquid accumulating and burning all at once.

Why was it so hard to *breathe?*

*"I wanted to keep you alive, to have you watch as I end everything you hold precious."*Adalonda continued, breath rattling in her throat. Her teeth were long, mouth open like some sort of dragon. *"I want you to watch; you know this is all your fault."*

Her body flailed, her torso twitching as she breathed in and out.

Breathed in.

Breathed out.

Adrian shook his head, “No, Adalonda. You treated me like a pawn and that’s your own downfall.”

Adalonda recoiled in shock. *“You dare defy me!”’*

“You treated me like a tool with no thoughts of my own!” Adrian antagonized, keeling over with a gasp, hand fumbling through his robe for small glass bottles. “And that’s your own fault! I’m not useless! And it’s taken me a long while to realize that, but this ends *here!”*

Adalonda hissed a low gurgled noise. *“You can’t kill me. You can’t use spells or magic lest you die. Look at you, you can hardly stand on those two legs of yours.”*

Adrian wheezed.

Adrian smiled.

“You’re right,” He gasped out, “I can’t. But if there’s one thing I know, I know magical creatures *really damned well!”*

“That does nothing!” Adalonda defended, confused but hiding it behind her heaving breaths and pink saliva drooling from the corner of her mouth. Her red eyes were staring furiously, willing him to die right then and there.

“You’re right,” Adrian croaked back, coughing and nearly stumbling to his knees. His hands closed on the glass bottles he had been reaching for, pulling them out carefully and slowly. The chilled liquid inside sloshed, freezing to the touch. He stashed them there against his sides, given to him sadly by Scamander in his last moments.

‘I’m sorry,’ The man told him.

Adrian *grinned.*

“Adalonda!” Adrian screamed, making sure he had her attention. “Snakes only have one lung! Snakes have a membrane running all the way down the back of their trachea, so they don’t suffocate while swallowing. In humans, we have oxygen enter our lungs at the bottom, but in snakes, that happens at the *top,”*

Adalonda wavered side to side, looking confused and disoriented and somehow small despite her hunkering height. There was blood dripping from her eyes, thick mucus slime dripped from her mouth.

“That means nothing. Basilisks are immortal!”

“Yeah,” Adrian grinned, his mouth pink, “only from the outside.”

Adalonda’s eyes widened in alarm and confusion. *“What?”*

She had given him the idea once, or maybe he had always been dreaming of it. Mixed in his waking hours, curiosity edged in cruelty that made him flinch away from it.

The glass vials in his hands were chilled, cold in his fingers. He wondered if she ever knew her own mortality.

Adrian smashed the glass on the ground, liquid instantly evaporating and mixing with the fumes from dozens and dozens of cleaning buckets scattered throughout the entire Great Hall. The buckets, that had been filled with rapidly evaporating ammonium. Cleaning solutions that burned to

breathe in.

'You put poison in my blood,' Adrian thought dazed and disoriented, humour tickling in all the morbidly wrong ways. *'I put it in the air.'*

"I hear they fumigate vermin," Adrian croaked out, thankful that the mixture was lighter than air and had accumulated up near Adalonda's head level, "I think it's time to kill a *rat."*

Ammonia gas was light, stinging and burning away at the mucus membranes available. It crept in, difficult to tell by the rancid odor alone if you were lacking certain olfactory senses like a snake. It burned his eyes, boiling against Adrian's skin. His mouth felt like he had drunk vinegar, his throat drooled.

The bottles exploded, chlorine evaporating and mixing into a single thick cloud of opaque gas.

This one, well.

Combining with fluid in a throat and lung, it created an acid so strong flesh and tissue melted from the inside out. Once a puncture appeared in a trachea or a lung, the pressure would deflate, and the victim would suffocate to death, if they didn't drown in their own blood.

There was a reason chlorine gas was something people did not mess with.

Adrian smiled, blood and slime dripping from his nose and mouth, skin blistering when brushed against the noxious cloud that burned the snake from the inside out.

A queen rendered dying from something peasants cleaned with.

"We're all damaged somehow," Adrian croaked out through the dizzying agony and pain on his flesh. He could hear Adalonda screaming, thrashing against the reinforced walls and glass of the sealed Great Hall. Gas rises, and Adalonda was so tall.

(Where was Adalonda's crown now?)

There wasn't anything pretty about it. There was no poetry to be written about the moment.

It was garish and disgusting, cruel even beyond that of Adalonda's nature. Adrian felt no glee, watching her die. He felt no satisfaction or delight in the prolonged agony and cries of a creature unable to perish quickly. He watched her eyes burst, corroding and melting as her lungs and throat turned liquid. It smelled foul, tainting the room and tainting Adrian's heart.

It had been a long struggle, a long battle against one another and at the end, all Adrian could feel was sadness.

'I wanted her to die,' Adrian thought to himself, *'because it would be mercy with one so deranged as her.'*

This wasn't mercy.

This was something beyond comprehension.

Adrian couldn't tell if the liquid running down his face was blood or tears or some mixture between the two.

Adalonda breathed twice, and then, she died.

Adrian stumbled out of the Great Hall, crawling on his knees with a wheeze and bloody spit. His eyes burned, his exposed skin was flushed and blistering. The inside of his mouth felt like a blood pop.

The fresh air felt strange, stinging as he hacked out the beginnings of his melted organs. Adrian couldn't help but smile, crawling wobbly with his head low as he spat out and choked on air like a newborn.

The gas behind him would escape when Scamander showed up to blast out the windows. The gas would escape naturally, everyone knew the Great Hall was off limits. Until then, it slowly creeped out behind him, spilling from the open doors like a curious foal.

Adrian had… he had to keep moving.

Adrian had to find Lutain he...he had left the snake near the main courtyard…

Adrian hacked and crawled, finding a railing to help him upwards. His eyes burned, blood dripping from his face. For once, it wasn't even from the parasite.

(It hurt oh god it stung so badly oh god his eyes were going to *explode.*)

He staggered down stairs, shut down from moving. Debris scattered around, paintings on fire, carpets shredded. Adrian kept walking, back down the path he had sprinted not long earlier. His mouth drooled foam and spit, he breathed poison.

It felt surreal, to walk down the steps he had walked a thousand times. The steps from the Great Hall to the courtyard. This time, he walked and left the corpse of a monster behind.

He walked unburdened by weight and guilt. Adrian reached up with shaking fingers, unclasping the Cerestes cloak. He let it flutter to the ground, reeking of toxins from its discarded heap. Adrian ignored it and kept walking. The cloak left behind him, poisonous to any who touched it.

There was shouting, bright lights and noises that disoriented him. The world was spinning, noises were slurred, and sounds had no meaning. He blinked through pink and saw clearly only for the world to pink over again.

His teeth tasted like rust. His chest felt heavy and wet.

Adrian grinned, teeth wide and gums hurting. His entire face hurt, body throbbing and numb. His head felt heavy and dizzy, burning and *wet.*

He had never a moment before to notice how bright the sun looked, even now in winter. It would be approaching spring soon, he imagined. The lake would thaw, and the water lilies would cover the surface in so many of those soft looking flowers. He liked the ones that were yellow, soft and pastel on the glassy surface.

Adrian giggled, bubbles from his lips at the thought. His eyes were wet, and the sun was very bright in the sky.

He knew he fell to the ground when the pink and red stained the snow write. He didn't think there would be much snow left over with all the chaos; all the feet running over it again and again.

He couldn't make sense of noises, of words. Sounds bright and sharp, movement all around him.

He knew he managed to the courtyard, where Lutain would be in all the scramble.

(Adrian was so tired, and his entire chest *hurt.*)

A face was next to his, one he recognized in nightmares and in mirrors. Adrian grinned, wide and pleased through the tingling vertigo of gravity. A mouth moved, quick and fierce, teeth bared in a silent snarl.

'Oh, he's mad.' Adrian could barely ration out. His father snarled like a furious monster, but Adrian had killed the last monster he met. Adrian had done the impossible and in return he coughed the words of the dying; blood and rot.

His father looked mad, or maybe he always had, and Adrian never noticed. It was strange, how clear his mind was now that it was boiling in formaldehyde. Would someone pull out his innards and place them in bottles along the Potions classroom? Adrian imagined they would be pitted and filled with holes, maggots feasting on his innards.

(Why was it, his hearing was the first thing to go?)

His father looked so, *so* mad at him.

Adrian was happy, he had done something wonderful after all.

Adrian grinned, gums blistered and melting. Teeth stained, eyes clouded and blue like those eyeballs he had that swished in bottles a lifetime ago. He wondered where Tonks had put them.

Voldemort was so mad at him.

His mouth moved in two words, wand pointed at Adrian's face.

Adrian Selwyn grinned, and dissolved away.

Chapter End Notes

4 Chapters left.

Link to Antithesis Artwork

Anger

Chapter Summary

The 5 Stages of Grief: ANGER

The more you feel it, the more it will begin to vanish. There are many emotions within it all, and not always in the way you imagine. Anger has no limits, it can extend to everyone and everything. Under it all, is your pain. It is natural to feel deserted and abandoned; anger is strength and can offer you shelter to the nothingness of loss. Anger is just another indication of the intensity of your love. Through it all, you may ask: "Where is God in this?"

(Where Adrian finds paradise as poisonous as we all forget.)

Chapter Notes

Here we all go.
3 Chapters left, and I'm sure few of you expected a chapter like this.
Heads up, this story will be done on Halloween, or before then. (2018)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was spring. The grass was soft and fresh, smelling of fertile earth and morning dew. It coated his cheek, brushing against his face in what would surely be a rash.

It was a nice temperature, foggy and crisp. It didn't burn or hurt his lungs like the winter air did, it wasn't sharp or fragrant like the peat bogs. It was gentle and soft, rounded on the edges.

Adrian grunted and used his forearms to lift him, gentle and careful. His joints didn't break, his skin didn't burn.

He righted himself, confused and dazed all at once. He had never been here where the grass was so green, darker and healthier than the evergreen trees. Even the soil under it was dark brown and lush.

There was moisture in the air but no threat of rain. It was overcast but still bright. It was an illusion so perfect it could only be real.

"Where…" Adrian paused, startling at the sound of his own voice. Deep, smooth without the rasp that followed him like a shadow. His words hung there before spreading out gently. He blinked and inhaled slowly, scratching his cheek in an anxious tick.

"Where am I?" Adrian whispered, smooth and quiet. Somewhere in the distant through the fog, there was a lake. He could see the movement of gentle waves lapping at the edges, but the sound was swallowed in the serenity.

He spun on his heels, bare feet digging into the grass. It must have been mixed with moss, there was no such grass as soft as this.

"Hello!" Adrian shouted, fearing for his own sanity for a moment. Had he somehow been trapped in his own mind? Had he been taken captive by a foreign invader?

A twig snapped, which was alarming since the trees around looked pristine and healthy. No such twigs should have fallen or littered the ground already.

Adrian spun, tearing up vegetation with the speed of his twirl.

Standing there, looking cheeky and ashamed, was a pale face with hair like spun gold.

"Hello," Luna grinned, eyes bright and ecstatic.

Luna showed him the lake, laughing and sprinting across the grass with no care. She was wearing a dress, long and white. It trailed after her like the wings of a dove, flowing and flapping like a patronus. She beamed, eyes bright and smile so pointed it threatened her face with bruising.

The water of the lake was cool, biting on his feet whereas the small minnows flitted around instead. The aquatic bugs skittered on the surface, the tadpoles sticking to the reeds that lined the mud layer.

"Here!" Luna laughed, forcing Adrian to fumble and hold the trail of her dress in his hands. The material was smooth and slick, untarnished and pristine where her toes wiggled coated in smelly clay.

"Do you think we could catch a frog?" Luna laughed, tugging her hair up on her head to twist it into a braid. Adrian's brow furrowed as he scoured his eyes along the bank.

"There's tadpoles…"' Adrian trailed off thoughtfully, "so there *should* be frogs."

Luna grinned, and they hunted like a pack of benign wolves.

They found frogs, large croaking ones that went *'ribbit!'* in Luna's thin fingers.

They planted seeds they plucked from sunflowers, burying them carefully and feeding it water from their cupped palms. They drank from the lake, splashing each other until Adrian slipped and stumbled in. Luna leapt in after, kicking and throwing muck in his hair. Her dress made her legs look like a mermaid; she looked serene.

"Where are the birds?" Adrian asked, squinting in the trees. Luna lent on him heavily, warm cheek resting against his. Her skin was pale and flawless, her perfume was just as he remembered it.

"I don't know," Luna confessed sheepishly, "want to go find them?"

Adrian huffed in good humor, "I doubt we'll find any."

"Where do *you* think they'd be?" Luna asked teasingly, her tongue poking out from between her white teeth. "We'll look there first."

Adrian rolled his eyes and huffed, plucking strands of grass out from her hair. "Maybe by the spruce trees. The top branches."

They looked and watched the crow flock, picking out berries that were bright red and juicy even in their eyes. Adrian plucked a few, not recognizing them but Luna didn't protest. They feasted until their fingers were sticky and pink, tongue stained with their prizes.

"Hey Luna?" Adrian asked curiously, sprawled on his back with the girl laying next to him. Her hair spread around her like a pillow, his arm over them like a pillow. The sky above had clouds moving slowly, plump and fluffy in various shapes. They picked out the ones they could see, making up names for the ones they couldn't interpret.

"Yeah?" She chirped back, glowing under the sunlight.

Adrian's mouth twitched into a grin, "I'm dead, aren't I?"

She didn't stop smiling. "Yep."

Adrian laughed, and Luna giggled in good humour over it all.

"That one looks like that one dragon!" Luna cheered, poking at the sky. Adrian traced his eyes along her hand, following her direction.

Adrian tilted his head and squinted a little, "I guess it does look like that one dragon. I wonder what happened to it after Skylar and I freed it."

Luna hummed a gentle tune, "it probably ate a pumpkin patch."

Adrian cackled; Luna was warm and gentle in his hands.

"You did this wrong," Luna hummed quietly, her finger tapping the single earring Adrian had stolen from her bedroom. Adrian huffed as if annoyed, he knew he could never be mad at her.

"Is that why It hurt so much?" Adrian smirked, eyes bright as he danced away from her reaching fingers. "How was I supposed to do it then?"

"Not like that!" Luna teased, leaping at him. Adrian danced away, knees bending and hips moving and nothing cracked.

"Did I do the right thing, Luna?"

"Of course you did, silly."

"Am I a good person?" Adrian asked her in a whisper. The sun set, the sky lit with green and purple dancing above them like fire. It was a gentle fire, a beautiful aura to it that Adrian could never replicate.

Luna rolled on her side, face hard to see in the darkness of the night. "I think you're a good person."

Adrian's brow furrowed ever so slightly in confusion, he chewed on his lower lip nervously. "How can you say that? I've done terrible things, Luna."

He could tell she was smiling at him, even if he couldn't see her face.

"It's okay," Luna whispered to him gently, a hand resting along his face to trace along the edge of his jaw. "It's okay Adrian."

"Luna I *killed-."*

"It's okay." Luna soothed in a whisper.

The fire in him burned out, and the hollow that existed in him remained empty and quiet and calm.

"How are you here?" Adrian asked, sitting on a rock with his feet in the water. He swished them back and forth, causing ripples that traveled over the surface.

Luna stood waist deep in the water, trailing fingers through wet hair to keep it smooth. It was shiny and soft, angelic.

Luna glanced over at him, sparing a moment to roll her eyes at him as if the question was stupid.

Adrian didn't notice that she didn't answer.

"What do you want to do today?" Luna asked him.

Her eyes sparkled like all the stars in the sky. They were blue, bright and clear.

Adrian's face softened, his fingers ran through her hair to tuck it behind her ears.

"I don't know." Adrian confessed quietly, running his thumb along her cheekbone. "I'm happy though."

Luna grabbed his wrist and smiled soft and shy. "Me too."

"Luna? Why are there no animals here?"

"Do you want there to be?"

"Hey Luna? What was the last thing you said to me?"

Luna's smile could have ended poverty. "You're not unlovable silly."

(That wasn't the last thing she said to him.)

(That was the last thing he *remembered.*)

Things didn't line up. Small things that bothered him; the softness of the grass despite there never being any rain.

The water was always gentle with minnows swimming. Adrian had never seen a large fish, but the moment he started looking he found them. The sun was overhead, but no matter how long they laid beneath it they never got sunburn until the moment Adrian thought about it .

Luna was just how he remembered her, how he dreamt of her in his mourning. She smelled like her perfume and her laugh were church bells.

Adrian thought that he had died in a church, or something similar. Under the crown of some wrathful god that didn't understand the ramifications of its actions.

He thought he died under his father's hand, but it was so hazy and hard to remember.

Luna, was exactly how he remembered.

"This place is an oasis." Adrian hummed, hand toying with leaves plucked from the nearby trees. "It's a paradise."

"Biblical today?" Luna teased, skipping between the tall columns of bark. "Does that make me Eve then?"

(LutainLutainLutain-)

Luna's face didn't even shift. "What about Ogygia? Do you know that myth?"

Adrian's eyes flickered in slight surprise. "Yeah, I didn't think you did. It's Greek."

Luna trailed her fingers across the rough bark and spun slowly around the trunk. "Calypso lived on Ogygia," Luna explained, looking deep in thought as Adrian too scrambled through his memory. "She was beautiful and the island was as well. It was paradise, and she and Odysseus lived there for eternity."

Adrian grinned and nodded, gazing around the valley and lake and forests and flowers. "This is Ogygia then."

Luna agreed with a wide toothed smile.

'Calypso kept Odysseus prisoner at Ogygia for seven years. Odysseus wished for circumstances to change, so at the request of the gods she bid him farewell on a raft.'

Luna's voice changed, shifting in melody and tune until it was something gentle.

He couldn't imagine her shouting at him.

They sat under the trees, watching the shade spill over the grass.

"If this is paradise," Adrian quietly asked, tilting his head in thought, "what do you gift someone who has everything they ever wanted?"

Luna leant against him.

He knew what she was going to say.

"You give them things they couldn't have." She explained contently. "Things they could never have again."

Adrian's mouth felt wrong. "You're not dead, Luna."

Luna shrugged her shoulder. "Thestrals, nobody really knows how that works."

(No, Adrian didn't know how that worked.)

"Did you ever think?" Luna started, leaning against his side as a gentle weight, "that what you were trying to do, leaving Tonks and Remus before you could say goodbye, is what you've done here? You said you wanted to leave them so they didn't turn your last moments into a concept on a pedestal. You wanted to leave so your memory wouldn't be inflated into something perfect and *not you."*

Luna grinned, eyes sparkling and *so so happy.* "Isn't that what you've done with me?"

Adrian woke next to something perfect. He woke next to something fake and made in his mind and something so *wonderful,* he could never look away.

"Come swimming with me?" Luna asked, tugging on his hand gently.

Adrian followed her, because he didn't know what else to do other than chase her.

"You're not real." Adrian spoke curtly, he wished his voice sounded as gravelly as he felt. "You're not the real Luna."

"I'm the Luna you remember," she pointedly poked back at him. "I'm everything you remembered, because you're afraid that you're a monster in the end. That I'm going to be afraid of this disgusting aberration you are now. That's why you look like this, that's why you aren't sick anymore."

Adrian flinched away, avoiding looking at his perfect skin and subtle muscle.

Luna smiled gently, "you love me, because you're terrified I'll hate you and your entire life will be worthless. You're a hypocrite, Adrian Selwyn. You're a disgusting hideous monster that deserves no love so that's why you're going to stay with me."

Adrian's throat felt sick despite the fact it couldn't be here. "Why are you saying that to me?"

Luna blinked, wide eyed and innocent. "Because you want me to say that."

"You're a very sick person." Luna confessed, pointing at the constellations he already knew. "But it's okay. I'm here now."

'You're not real.' Adrian wanted to whisper.

Adrian realized it with a certain clarity.

Paradise is dependent on the person. Paradise for one is not a paradise for another.

Everyone is relative, but what do you give someone who dreams of the one thing they cannot ever have?

(You draft their memories and pluck on harpsichord until it's close enough, you can accept it all the same.)

"I love you," Luna repeated gently, smiling like the sun. He couldn't imagine her frowning. "I love

you so much, Adrian."

Adrian closed his eyes, trying not to think of her.

"Nobody is going to love you more than I do." She whispered, fingers tracing along the tops of his shoulder.

Adrian flinched, and looked away.

Adrian knew, when he remembered Sunflowers don't grow in spring, that everything was fake.

The sunflowers weren't here, the lake and the trees and the grass wasn't here.

Nothing was here, it was only here because he wanted it to be.

This wasn't Luna. This was his skewed and biased memory but it *wasn't-*.

"You're right, what you said." Luna spoke, smiling contently despite the horror of her words. Adrian had never felt so close to vomiting before.

"That I'm not here. I'm everything you've thought and everything you've dreamed up- I'm all this for *you."*

No. Oh god no.

"No, you're not real." Adrian protested, barely able to get the words from his throat.

Luna frowned, tilting her head with a frown.

"You're just in my head." Adrian argued.

Luna reached out, her fingers cupping his cheek to rest below his eye. Adrian leaned into the touch, smelling the fragrance of her skin.

"Isn't that what you want?" Luna asked gently, the breath from her lips sugary and sweet. "It's over now, Adrian. I'm everything you've ever wanted. I'm *here,* and you can stay with me forever."

Adrian wanted to cry, everything was so *wrong,* warped and perfect and he had forgotten the sound of her voice. He had forgotten the exact shade of blue that her eyes were, the smell of her skin and the way her smile lit up her whole face, "but you're not *real."*

Luna leaned forward, her hair silk over his skin. "It doesn't matter," she whispered gently to him, kind and unjust for the monstrosity he was, "because I'm here with you forever, and I *love you."*

"No," Adrian shook his head, shaking her hand free from where it touched his face. "I- I can't do that. You're not real, you're just in my head."

Luna looked hurt, and Adrian's heart throbbed in agony. She lowered her hand, taking a step back. Her shoes parted the wildflowers at her feet, Adrian recognized every flower from the bundles she gifted him.

"Does that make me not okay?" Luna asked, looking close to tears, "are...are you saying that just because I'm in your head, I'm not…"

"*No*," Adrian blurted instantly, breathing shakily and fisting his hands in his hair, "you- you're in

my head so you can't-."

"Memories are in our head," Luna whispered gently, "yet those are things we hold more precious than life itself."

"Luna I-."

"It's okay," she whispered, nodding her her head as if she knew all along. "It's okay now. I'm not real, but I'm here. You've made it."

Adrian tried to summon a sense of courage or defiance in the wake of her devoted understanding. "That's not fair to you."

Luna smiled and sighed so gentle it was barely more than a breath. "It doesn't need to be fair, because this is all for you. This is your finale, Adrian. This is where you finally let go, because you're done, you can finally close your eyes and let go."

Adrian wanted to, oh god how he wanted to. He wanted to run his hands through her hair, braiding it down her neck and trace the notches of her spine. He wanted to *breathe*, to feel the sun on his face and banish away the eternal coldness that had haunted his bones for years. Adrian wanted to finally rest, but he couldn't.

"No," he denied with the smallest twitch of a smile, saltiness burning on his face. "I can't."

"Adrian, it's okay, you can rest now-."

"No, because because I haven't made it, Luna." Adrian cut off with a warbling laugh, "because I'm not done yet. I know, that one day the time will come when I can finally just…*stop,* but it's not now. I have things to do, I have things to finish. You're in my head, I know that, but I can never stop until the Luna I know can rest as well."

Luna stood there, tilting her head silently. "When are you going to stop?"

"I'll know the time has come, when I see you again again and you'll bring a smile to my face before a tear to my eye, and I will *never*[1] stop until then."

Luna tilted her head, and the world flashed.

"Is this it?" She asked, quiet and nervous. The grass was gone, instead now they were on a bridge. Made of stone in large arching patterns, seagulls circling below them towards the coast. He could spot seals if he searched. The breeze was salty, it blew the ornate flowers from Luna's hair.

It lifted the white veil from in front of her face.

Adrian cried; Luna looked amazing in white.

"I always wanted birdhouses." Luna laughed, running down the sidewalk in her obnoxiously orange shoes. The fence was built almost entirely out of birdhouses, the house a horrible shade of bright pastels. It was disgusting and perfect and Adrian could wake up and have his morning coffee at the kitchen table. He could shoo the household kneazle off the counter.

He knew there would be animals in the back, all the serpents and rescued magical creatures needing care. He could live like this, waking up to perfume and hippogriff feathers. He could live his entire life content and *happy.*

"Is this better?" Luna asked, twirling and looking absolutely obscene in her giant sweater. It managed to hide the swell of her stomach. It hid the shape of her body because it wasn't important to him. Her face was older, wrinkles on the corner and a small burn scar under one ear. She was wearing simple earrings, little black obsidian shards in the shape of a snake.

Adrian's hand flashed to his ear- a single crescent moon earring jangled.

Luna looked down sheepishly, scuffing her shoes on the floor. Herbs hung from the ceiling like an apothecary, it smelled like lavender and catnip.

"Luna." Adrian choked out, everything so domestic it *hurt.*

"What do you want from me?" Luna asked worriedly, chewing on her lower lip. "Because you have me. *All* of me. Forever."

Adrian choked, shaking hands covering his face. His unblemished face, fit with wrinkles and laugh lines on the corner. "I- *fuck."*

Luna walked closer to him, worried and so *caring.* "Adrian? Adrian are you okay? Adrian I-."

"You're not real!" Adrian screamed. The household kneazle bolted, startled by the noise. It nearly knocked down a jar of flowers that Adrian remembered giving her.

(No he didn't. This wasn't real.)

"I-." Luna's eyes were watering, "I- I *am* real."

"No," Adrian moaned, crying into his trembling hands. "This is a perfect dream and I don't want to wake up."

Luna gently lowered herself to her knees. "I...no, *no.* It's...the other place. The other life, *that* was the bad dream, Adrian."

Adrian keeled over and whimpered.

"It's okay now," Luna whispered into his shoulder. "I love you forever and ever."

(You're not real.)

"You can spend an entire lifetime, in a blink of an eye." Luna whispered to him. Her breath sweet on his skin. "There aren't anymore clocks to keep count anymore."

Adrian shivered, twitching as something in him gave. "I want to spend forever with you, Luna."

She smiled and pressed her forehead against his. "I know."

"This isn't perfection," Adrian whispered, choking on the words.

Luna stirred slightly from where she had napped on him. Her voice sleep-thick and dazed. "It's torture."

"Good morning," Luna grinned bright and delighted, "do you want to go looking for chestnuts?"

Adrian shrugged one shoulder, staring out the window. There was no point to it, if he desired to see something it would be there. That was how perfection worked.

"Do you want to go for a walk?"

Adrian gave a single curt laugh. "I want to go."

Luna's face didn't change. "No you don't."

No, he didn't.

"You make me so happy, Adrian."

"Do I?"

"You make *me* so happy."

"You're not Luna." Adrian didn't look away from the window. He didn't look away from the sunrise so gorgeous it made his breath still. "You're...I loved you, Luna. I loved you so much."

Luna tilted her head slightly, curious. She was everything he wanted her to be. "I loved you like the fall of Rome?"

Adrian smiled bitterly, and dreamed of fire.

I loved you like the fall of Rome;

for the empires crushed to dirt beneath your heels,

for the buildings that burnt in my hands when I touched you.

"I killed Adalonda for you." Adrian whispered as the rain came down, soothing on the roof shingles. "I killed her so so horribly, Luna."

Luna was dozing, almost asleep. "Y' didn' do it f'r me."

"You're right." Adrian whispered, letting her sleep. "I did it for Luna."

He wouldn't ever forget her scream, the gurgling rasp of her death throes. He crawled away from her body before it started trembling from post-mortem twitches. He killed a god, and then he left it to rot.

I loved you like the devil came screaming downwards from heaven

Trailing angels in his wake

"You know there's a chance that she won't love you." Luna pouted, kneading dough with her fingers. Her hair was spiraled and tied on the top of her head, shaped like a crown.

Adrian's fingers tapped along the table. "I know."

"I don't know why you'd ever think to risk it?" Luna confessed quietly, "I love you."

Adrian's smile was thin, "you're not Luna. That's why I can't stand this anymore."

Luna's lower lip trembled. "I...I *love you."*

Adrian twitched. "You're only saying that, because I want the real Luna to love me."

She didn't respond.

Adrian grinned savagely, and wished that this time, the gas would boil him from the inside out.

"When you're here with me," Luna whispered to him, "it means you never failed at saving me."

Adrian closed his eyes. He knew that already.

You were the end of the world, and I

Craved you

Thoughtlessly

"I remembered the Greek Myth with Calypso, I didn't at first." Adrian smiled, sitting with his feet dipped into the lake. "I didn't realize the irony of it when we called this place Ogygia."

Luna didn't respond. She knew, because he did.

"See," Adrian continued, a single dry huff of amusement to try and stave off how much it hurt, "the myth said that Calypso kept Odysseus captive, bewitching him with her voice and music. He was held prisoner there for seven years, she intended it to be for eternity."

Luna swallowed thickly. "But the gods refused her request, and she gave him supplies to build a raft. And he left."

Adrian nodded, kicking the water so it *splashed.* "And he left."

There was a chance that he would be alone forever.

If he did nothing, then that wasn't simply a chance for Luna.

That was her reality.

"I'm not leaving because I don't love you," Adrian whispered into the crown of her head. "I can't do this, because the longer I stay here the less I love myself."

'Can I tell you a secret? You're not unlovable silly, because I love you.'

Adrian sighed and stepped onto the raft, kicking it off into the little lake.

Luna stood on the edge of the water. She looked beautiful in her white dress. A concept, a symbol

he made of her memory to validate his own means.

He hadn't thought of her as a person in a long, long time.

He doubted he'd ever see her face again.

Adrian didn't want to live chasing a memory.

So Adrian grabbed a small paddle, and he started pushing water, and he let Luna go.

You were a deep hole in me, a rendering of the flesh

And I was foolish enough to love the wound.

"It's okay," Adrian whispered to himself, pulling his small raft further into the mist. "Things we lose have a way of coming back to us in the end, if not always in the way we expect."

Chapter End Notes

3 Chapters left

Have I broken your heart yet?

Link to Antithesis Artwork

Bargaining

Chapter Summary

The 5 Stages of Grief: BARGAINING
The normal reaction to the helplessness and vulnerability that comes through loss is an attempt to regain control. We negotiate, we bargain, and try to find a way to equal what we lost. Maybe if I had done things different? Maybe I could have stopped this? We cling to the threads of hope and wait for them to tear apart.

(Sometimes we see things we wish we hadn't. Sometimes we turn into things we wish we weren't.)

Chapter Notes

Please note that this chapter has serious topics that may be distressing for some readers. If you need to take a break at any point, then *please do so* , this story will still be here. Take a moment, breathe.

Also, take note of the current Virus spread throughout all of Fanfiction.net. I am delaying the posting of this chapter on FF.net due to the virus, and to prevent possible traffic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Have you ever seen something so horrible, that you instantly fight the notion it could have happened. You instantly deny its ability, or the possibility what you saw was true. Facts aren't facts anymore, truth becomes lies because this *cannot* be life. This cannot be reality anymore.

People screaming faded into a buzz. A flash of movement that couldn't- that wouldn't be understood.

A thrum of blood that was so overwhelming Skylar couldn't understand it. He couldn't understand any of the sounds, the lights.

He didn't- he couldn't-.

Adrian slumped to the ground, entire body shifting and shuddering. He was twitching, little subtle trembles of his body. Skylar could have believed it, he could have smiled and gasped in relief and he could have believed it; Adrian fell with his head at an obscure angle, jaw open and facing Skylar.

He looked a bit like those images in textbooks, the ones that didn't move because they were too grotesque. His eyes were glazed over like sheep eyeballs in jars, thick and white with a blue circle in the middle. His skin looked a bit ill, a bit overcooked, blistering in patches like a well roasted

Christmas Turkey.

There was liquid pooling from his mouth, thick and frothing; like vomit if Skylar hadn't eyesight good enough to see chunks of his throat peel away like the segments on an orange.

Skylar couldn't look away.

Voldemort (*it'sHimIt'sHim)* look up, red eyes glimmering and *furious.* His eyes met Skylar's across the courtyard, across the span of running screaming bodies. Skylar couldn't hear words, and the monster across from him didn't say anything.

Voldemort's eyes narrowed, his nostrils flared, and he vanished without a sound.

Silent apparation was very difficult, Skylar didn't think it was possible.

Adrian gurgled wetly, diaphragm shifting with a spasm.

He...he'd need to help Adrian get up. They needed to run away, he needed to get over there and help Adrian to his feet and they could both get out of there…

Arms grabbed him, gristle and strong. They were dragging him away from Adrian, from where he was laying sprawled on the ground waiting for someone to help him up.

"No no," Skylar mumbled, quickly increasing in volume, "no! No put me down! Put me *down!"*

The- the snake where was- where was the snake-.

Skylar spotted Lutain, prone and sprawled, twitching in death rattles next to his master.

Skylar hadn't...he...he hadn't seen…

When had Lutain gone- had had he gone to to...to check on-.

Adrian wasn't moving. His skin looked...he…

"Adrian!" Skylar *screamed,* thrashing in the tough grip around his sides, yanking him into the castle, "Adrian! *Adrian!"*

He...when had Lutain been- he-.

Oh, he...Lutain had...gone over the moment his master stumbled out in the light-

Adrian was grinning and drooling and-.

"Adrian." Skylar mumbled, feeling very very sick. "He- we... *Adrian."*

He couldn't hear or understand what people were saying, even as they shuffled him into the castle. He briefly spotted Moody- he hadn't seen the man in a long time, tend to the small cuts from shrapnel. Skylar felt cold, shaken and confused.

"I- I we…" Skylar's jaw was rattling, "w-we...we've got to- Adrian he, he needs help he…"

A hand on his shoulder, then a blanket tucked under his chin close to his body. "W-we need to, he needs *help…"*

"Boy," Moody grimaced, looking unsettled and unsure, "we...Selwyn's dead."

No, Skylar wanted to argue, picturing white and blue eyes, thick like rotting meat, *I just saw him.*

Adrian had been dying for months now. Skylar never really thought about what he'd look like dead.

Skylar heaved, until nothing came out.

Dumbledore hurried, shushing students passed him into the direction of the Hospital Wing. The Great Hall was still off limits, windows smashed with Newt Scamander's help. It was only when the fumes had escaped that Dumbledore could run inside, retrieving a fang from the basilisk (*Merlin's beard, it was huge.*).

The fang made quick work of the ring around his finger, releasing a plume of corrosive magic. The wards enacted to force out the gas easily contained the malignant fragment. The children, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger sprinted behind him, carrying the other portions they had all gathered.

The locket went first, shattering under the brutal force of the venom tip. It cracked the fang, barely breaking through the protective shell to the inner core. Thankfully, the corpse of the giant basilisk had dozens more to offer, each deadly to banish away the fractions of Tom's soul.

The Hufflepuff Chalice, Ravenclaw's Lost Diadem in the Room of Hidden things, just as he suspected. The diary long since destroyed for Tom's resurrection, Nagini succumbing to Salazar's beast with dozens of witnesses.

They were destroyed, *damaged,* and Dumbledore's shaking poisoned hand fumbled with the ring; the resurrection stone untouched in the light.

He had no time for this now, not with his passing looming ever closer. Tom was weakened, defenceless. Perhaps he was wrong in his interpretation of the prophecy, perhaps the role of young Adrian Selwyn was finished.

What he had heard so far- that Tom had...had *struck down his child* with no mercy…

Dumbledore felt old, and far too weak to ever witness something like this again.

He rushed to where they were storing the boy, both his two young escorts racing after.

Skylar Potter was curled in the corner, pale and shaking. His teeth rattled so loudly it seemed as if they would fall out. Alastor stood over him, a firm frown arching on his mouth. Skylar twitched, eyes unseeing and flitting around frantically.

"Skylar," Dumbledore sighed in relief, thankful that the boy was not being treated for wounds, "are you alright?"

Alastor shook his head sharply, "'fraid not, Albus. The boy's unresponsive. I was going to contact…" he trailed off pointedly. That's right, James and Lily were invited to fight as well. Albus had feared something happened to them.

"Sky?" Hermione blurted in alarm, nearly running forward to grab the boy. Ron grabbed her arm, holding her back. "No! Ron let me go! Skylar!"

Skylar didn't react, numb to the world.

"What happened?" Dumbledore asked lowly, eyes on Moody who grimaced in response. He fumbled with his wand, not wanting to meet the man's eyes. "Selwyn got the killing curse. In front of everyone. He wasn't looking that good from that bloody plan of his."

Dumbledore's eyes widened in horror; he had seen the damage on the basilisk, more gruesome than the dark perverse magics Grindelwald had dabbled in. He couldn't imagine what poor Selwyn resembled now. Albus had seen the bodies, gassed and begging even in death over in Germany. He had been too late then, as well.

"Oh, my boy." Dumbledore sighed, lowering himself gently to his knees. They creaked in his age, protesting the movement.

"Sir," Skylar sobbed out, barely present in the focus of his eyes, "he- he- *Adrian,* he, they...they...he needs his...his *body."*

"It's okay," Dumbledore soothed, trying to find some sort of peace in the silent crying around them. At some point, Miss Granger clued in and was now sobbing horrible gasping noises. Mr. Weasley looked like he expected it all along.

It was far too soon, far far too soon.

Newt Scamander hurried in, looking far too anxious. Considering the castle was under siege, it was understandable.

"Albus," Newt stumbled out, chewing on his lower lip, "I ah, I'm sorry but ah, we...we *can't* move him it...I've neutralized the trail he left but-..."

Dumbledore closed his eyes in frustration. "The parasite. I understand."

Scamander's breath left him in a rush. "I'm so sorry, Albus. I...There was nothing I could do."

"No I imagine not," Dumbledore shook his head sadly. He felt numb, helpless and faced with something far too overwhelming to ever accept as real.

"Albus," Scamander started in a whisper, trying to tug the man away for a small hint of privacy. "I...it...It wasn't good."

Albus tried not to twitch at the broken sound in his friend's voice. He nearly hung his head in his shame.

"It was *bad."* Scamander kept whispering, looking ready to keel over. "I...I hadn't thought it would... *Merlin,* I *let* him lure that thing into the hall and I- I only threw *roosters* down that pipe and he…"

"You didn't know." Albus interjected, trying to cut off the broken man's ramblings. "You didn't know how badly it would damage him."

Newt gave a curt laugh. His eyes were watering, glazed in horror. "Albus, I have never seen something as horrific. Not even...Albus *his eyes…"*

Albus closed his eyes and breathed through his nose. It helped only slightly against the nausea.

"I know how Tom intends to act on this." Dumbledore murmured lowly, lifting his eyes slightly to

draw Alastor Moody over to the discussion. Ron and Hermione bolted to Skylar, falling to their knees to try and soothe their hysterical friend.

“What is it, Albus?” Moody asked in a low grumble, looking far too grim to have no suspicions.

Dumbledore smiled, and Moody glanced away quickly.

“Ah,” Moody grumbled under his breath, “so it’s that then.”

“It’s what?” Scamander hurried out, wringing his hands, “oh Merlin, oh Merlin there’s *more.”*

“Unfortunately, we cannot allow ourselves to rest-.”

“Do you have no sympathy!” Newt Scamander shouted, reeling back with wide desperate eyes. “He- a boy just *died!”*

Ron and Hermione quieted instantly. Skylar gave another horrible sounding sob.

Dumbledore smiled softly, tears finally breaking down his face. “I know, I *know.* I will never forget this loss but I cannot afford to slow myself down, for you see...I fear that Tom is already returning in another assault, blinded with pride and arrogance in his victory.”

“No,” Newt whispered, shaking his head slowly. “ *Already?* He- it’s been only an hour!”

“That’s how war is,” Moody grumbled although he too sounded exhausted. “He’s pressing his advantage. He bloody killed the prophecy boy, he’s cocky now.”

“Maybe he didn’t.” Ron sniffed, voice quiet and small in the room. He too, was crying. “Selwyn he- the prophecy thing. What was it? Like, it said he would defeat You-Know-Who, right? Didn’t he?”

Hermione gasped and jolted, looking hopeful but rather ugly with her puffy eyes. “Ronald! Vanquish! Vanquish is defined as defeating thoroughly, but defeat could...couldn’t defeat refer to preventing You-Know-Who? From his goal?”

Dumbledore smiled thinly, “optimism. Perhaps you are right, and young Mr. Selwyn unknowingly *did* complete the prophecy, but that is all we can hope for in these times. I find, that hope is something quite powerful.”

“Albus…” Moody warned in a low growl, “...what are you planning?”

Albus smiled sadly and looked down at Skylar, still trembling under the unconscious tight grip on the blanket around him. “Perhaps it is time, that I too face atoning for all the pain I have caused. If perhaps my opportunity will protect the innocent, then it is a cost I will always be willing to provide.”

“No,” Scamander whispered, paling with horror, “surely you don’t mean…”

Albus reached out and patted the man on his shoulder, “I thank you, for the help and compassion you have given us all. You were my student, but you have taught us all many lessons, my friend.”

“Sir?” Hermione whispered, eyes welling in tears as she clutched Ron to her side. Skylar watched it all blankly, not able to comprehend.

“I’ll send the word,” Moody looked grim, resigned and knowing. “It’ll be public, you know.”

Dumbledore smiled, “well, I suppose it is good I decided to wear my best socks today.”

The dungeons were dark and damp, the air clouded by dust that stirred through the air from the rumbling vibrations of fighting.

They stayed out of sight, hidden and forgotten next to the large slabs of bedrock, pulled lovingly from a forgotten quarry. The torch scones looked wet, reflecting firelight off cast iron like it was a street performer showing an illusion.

Daphne hated the dungeons, she always found herself walking around the upper levels instead. The long dark hallways were safe, confusing to those who didn’t run through them often. The potions classroom was towards the start of the dungeons, not at all pushed into the forgotten bowels of the castle. Daphne always wondered if she looked far enough, would she would find catacombs?

The dungeons used to be something safe and secure, but now for the Slytherin students they felt oppressive. They were thrown down to their dorms in the heat of battle, cast aside because they were *snakes.*

‘It’s not fair!’ Daphne wanted to shout desperately, *‘Selwyn is a snake too!’*

Instead, he was above them running along staircases and throwing fires. She wondered if he knew where they were all hidden, forced to stay out of sight.

“You’re thinking too hard.” Astoria whispered, walking next to her sister to lean against her side gently. The year had been hard, Astoria felt like a ghost now in both mind and presence. Maybe she had decided to fill the void left by Lovegood.

“I’m not.” Daphne defended weakly. “I don’t like being down here.”

Astoria hummed quietly, lighting her wand with a soft blue glow. The castle above them had been quiet for a while, she wondered if they had lost already.

She heard people walking behind, emerging from the labyrinth most of her house was wandering through anxiously. She peered over her shoulder, spotting the small group of glowing wands and shapeless bodies. Gaunt faces, eyes reflecting like a cat in firelight.

“Greengrass.” Millicent grunted, her thick jaw threw shadows over her face that made her look more troll-like. “Any word?”

Astoria shifted, resting her head against Daphne’s shoulder further. Theodore Nott walked around, leading the small group through the darkened passages. He looked quiet, composed and far too cold for her comfort.

“No,” Daphne muttered quietly, the hallways too quiet to speak at full voice, “they’re keeping us in the dark.”

“Fat lot of good that’d do.” Theo muttered, looking pale and haunted. Daphne didn’t remember seeing him down before, when they were forced into the basement at wand point. “It’s...it’s not good.”

Astoria tilted her head curiously, Theo kept walking around until they formed a loose misshapen circle.

“You heard from up there?” Millicent blurted sharply with a scowl, “why didn’t you say earlier? You showed up out of the blue like bloody Peeves- what’s going *on* up there!”

Theo shifted, rolling his shoulders dismissively. Crabbe and Goyle glanced at each other from the back of the group, confused and aimless.

“They killed the basilisk,” Theo informed them, his voice flat and dead. “I heard when I came back down.”

A chill in the air, the thought of a basilisk in the walls hunting them for *years…*

“Bloody Hell.” Millicent cursed quietly, kicking a nearby wall. It didn’t do anything.

Daphne wanted to go upstairs, but she wasn’t sure what she would face. She wasn’t sure if there was a guard, ready to kill her on sight. She didn’t have the same pass that Theodore did, she wasn’t a friend of a madman.

“What’s that?” Theo whispered, entire body arching into a tense bend. His wand was poised, ready to go.

They froze, breathing paused. They heard footsteps from the direction of the stairs, slow, lazy thumping with a scuffling of someone smaller.

“Nox.” Astoria whispered, her wand flickering out. On cue, the group around her followed, washing them in darkness.

The footsteps came closer, adrenaline pulsed. A wand was glowing down the hallway coming closer.

They would never forget the face in question, pale with bloodshot eyes. Eye bags were dark and purpling, bruises across the lower edge of his pointed jaw.

Pansy, hanging back and silent from behind Crabbe stepped forward. Blindly wiggling past Astoria to squint and see the face they hadn’t forgotten almost a year later. They didn’t think to see him alive again.

“Draco?” Pansy whispered, voice loud in the silence of the cold cold hallway.

Draco stopped moving, his throat shifted as he swallowed. Someone large moved behind him, a wand glowing much brighter than Draco’s charm.

Daphne recognized the scarred leathery face of the man instantly, he was something of a legend after-all. She had met him on occasion, at the charity gala’s before everything went to shite.

“Fuck,” Theo breathed, taking a step backwards when he recognized the grizzled and amused eyes of the master dueler Rowle. “ *Fuck.”*

Rowle grinned, sharp teeth like a hyena. “I can hear you, you know.”

Draco’s face twitched; Daphne knew horror and terror when she saw it.

Astoria’s breathing stopped, and Daphne stepped a half step forward. She lifted her wand, and murmured a shaky, “ *lumos.”*

Her face glowed, Rowle’s eyes scanned her features. She couldn’t tell if he remembered her or not.

“Well,” Rowle started, a low grumble of his voice, “I was looking for Severus but instead I find some brats.”

Theo was shying away, trying to disguise his face or hide it. Daphne didn’t know why, but she was starting to feel dread over it.

“I don’t know where the professor is.” Daphne informed him, proud of how her voice shook only slightly, “I imagine he’s upstairs.”

Rowle smiled, amused. “Don’t be like that. I have a score to settle with Severus, but well...I’m a bit *bored.”*

Draco swallowed, eyes glazed and desperate.

‘He’s going to kill him,’ Daphne realized with a cold shift down her back. Rowle, the famous duelist, was going to kill Draco.

“I imagine there’s excitement upstairs.” Theo broke in, voice curt and sharp. He faced the light directly, thin nose throwing a shadow over his cheekbone. “I imagine lots of blood if you’re into that.”

Rowle’s eyes flickered slightly, “You’d know. I saw you up there, fighting with that *brat.”*

Theo’s jaw twitched slightly, “yeah well, I saw you kill a couple Ravenclaws. Fair’s fair, ya know?”

The casual tone of it all scared Daphne the most. Rowle laughed, eyes and face sharp. Pansy was edging around, watching from the safety of Theo’s shoulder.

“You’re fun.” Rowle admitted with one eyebrow lifted, “I’m going to slit your goddamn horse faced throat.”

Theo grinned back, “I have a rat face. Not like you, if you were anymore inbred you’d be a fuckin *sandwich.”*

Rowle paused, looking stunned for a split second. Theo dropped to the ground, jabbing his wand and spitting out “Expecto Patronus! Eat Sunbittern you disgusting *fuck!"*

Something small but *fast* shot out- flying with startling speed. The bright silvery glow of the bird nearly blinded the group, especially as it flared its short wings which were decorated with two nearly fluorescent spots similar to eyes. It flapped, diving forward ferociously and *hissed* out an unexpected noise.

Rowle jolted backwards, Draco dropped to the ground and scampered on his knees in a desperate lunge that looks awkward and unsightly. Rowle cursed crudely, lifting his hand to smack the bird aside- it couldn’t have been larger than a chicken.

“Avis!” Pansy shouted, filling the hallway with a dozen small blackbirds. She repeated it desperately, forcing the distance between them to be lit by fast moving feathers.

“Crucio!” Rowle spat out, finally ignoring the silvery patronus. The red spell shot towards them, striking one of the many near invisible birds in the darkness. It screamed in a noise Astoria found herself shivering at.

“Well come on!” Theo shouted at them, grabbing Draco’s hand from the ground to yank the other

to his feet. Crabbe and Goyle took off in a sprint, Pansy lagging behind to conjure more and more birds. They didn't dare light a spell, afraid any sort of illumination would give away their position.

"Muffliato." Draco croaked out, sounding as horrible as he looked. Their feet were silenced, they kept sprinting. Astoria was panting desperately, adrenaline making her skin itch.

Rowle was using blasting curses now, explosions illuminating the hallway with fire. They barely managed to escape down a sharp turn, already aware of the disadvantage they had.

"Keep going!" Theo hissed, twisting to aim over his shoulder. His eyes narrowed before he stumbled out the patronus charm again. The same bird shot out- Daphne couldn't tell before but it had a crane-like head to it. Some sort of small fishing bird she had never seen before.

The bird took off down a different hallway; everyone knew that Rowle was too intelligent to fall for a trick so obvious.

"We need help." Draco gasped out, breathing heavy, "we- we can't-."

"I *know,* alright?" Theo snapped back viciously, "I was bloody *up there,* I saw!"

The wall behind them *exploded.* Only a few meters away from them- the blast would have easily killed them.

They stumbled over something squawking, feathers flying as something sprinted away from them. Pansy barely regained her footing, shrieking in surprise. Rowle rounded the corner, lumos lighting up the completely unexpected rooster. It was a pretty rooster, large and feathered. Daphne had no idea why a *rooster* was running loose in the bowels of Hogwarts.

Rowle though skittered to a stop, nearly slamming himself into a wall to not hit the poor bird. It would have been more in character for the man to have crushed it under his foot, so the sudden violent caution made even Theo stumble on his next stride.

"Bloody- *Grifdor."* Rowle spat out between his teeth, verging around the confused chicken before he continued in hot pursuit- although the gap was much larger now.

"What's a-." Goyle started in a grunt, before he suddenly seized and gasped, dropping unexpectedly. Pansy *screamed,* Crabbe stumbled and forced her to keep moving.

Daphne glanced from the corner of her eye how Goyle's face was very bloody and different in normal shape. She didn't glance a second time, but instead ushered Astoria to run even faster.

"Goyle!" Pansy was sobbing brokenly, hands curling into claws to leave small bloody lines on Crabbe's forearm, "he- *he-."*

"'Keep fucking running!" Theo hissed viciously, forcing them to take another bend down a thinner hallway. "Bombarda!"

The spell shot down the narrow hallway, it missed but it still forced Rowle to step aside instead of deflecting and causing the hallway to come down on him.

"Come on out!" Rowle shouted, taunting them even as they sprinted, "come on out little brats!"

"Like fuck we will!" Millicent screamed back, doing a marvelous job of keeping up so far. "Crucio!" she screamed.

The spell fizzled and fell short, not managing to materialize. Draco swore, and Millicent stared at her with with something like acceptance.

“Come on!” Pansy shouted desperately, ignoring the way Millicent smiled at her wand with a challenge in her eye.

“You go ahead,” Millicent jutted out her chin, readying herself. Pansy grabbed her own hair in hysteria.

“Stop being *stupid!”* Pansy shrieked, Theo cursed and shoved his wand upwards towards the ceiling of the corridor.

“Defodio!” Theo shouted, casting the spell behind them at the ceiling of the corridor. Instantly, the mining spell started to carve out large chunks of the stone archway. It was easy to see what he wanted, because after three of the spells the hallway groaned and large rocks started cascading.

“No!” They could hear Rowle on the other side, thoroughly frustrated with everything going on, “Tabificus!”

The curse was fast, much faster than falling rocks. It was a putrid yellow, impacting Millicent’s side and sending her shrieking to the ground. The landslide caved in, separating the Death Eater from the group of terrified students.

Millicent contorted, gasping and whimpering. Pansy scrambled to her knees, tearing her tights on rubble as she hurriedly conjured light.

Millicent was moaning in pain, the side of her arm where the curse had struck was bubbling, rolling around like hot way. Pansy’s hands hovered unsure of what to do to alleviate the pain.

“Leave it,” Draco rasped out shakily, “It wears off. It only glanced her.”

Millicent sobbed, tears and snot running down her face as her arm melted.

“What the hell was that!” Daphne turned on Theo, teeth gnashing together, “you could have crushed us!”

“Better crushed than goddamn slaughtered!”

“What you did was dangerous,” Draco added in quietly, backing up until his back could rest against the stone. “It could have hurt us.”

Theo looked between the two in outrage, “are you bloody *serious* right now?”

“W-What about the chicken?” Pansy sobbed out nervously, “I- I touched it. Am- am I going to *die?”*

Crabbe slowly lowered himself to the ground, staring blankly at the wall. They were all too aware of the lack of Goyle.

“No,” Daphne clipped out shakily, “he...he called it a Grifdor. Selwyn bought one in Hogsmeade, from that store before the owner went mad.”

Draco swore quietly, fumbling with his hands. “That *bloody* Grifdor. Different thing, but looks like a ruddy chicken alright.”

Astoria swallowed and stared at the wall, “..the...the owner went mad?”

Daphne shushed her sister, trying to soothe her the best she could. “Yes but it’s alright, it was long ago. Selwyn probably did something accidentally, it’s alright that wasn’t a Grifdor.”

Astoria exhaled heavily, “he made someone go mad when he was young?”

Draco stood shakily, “we need to keep moving, it’s not saf-.”

The wall shuddered, rocks began to roll.

“Move!” Theo shouted, grabbing Pansy’s arm to hurl her away from Millicent. He grabbed the larger girl’s good arm, yanking her up around his shoulders. They started a hobble, quick and haphazard in Millicent’s condition but desperate.

The wall shook again, Daphne’s breathing hitched and Astoria whimpered.

The wall *melted,* bright purple flames burned through the gap in the trail of a whip. It pulled apart, lighting the hallway and the backs of the sprinting students.

“Keep moving!” Draco shouted, cursing under his breath. Everyone knew they couldn’t take the man in a duel, it was *insane* to ever think of that. “I’ll hold him!”

“You can’t you *idiot!”* Theo seethed, nearly spitting fire at the thought. Draco scoffed, eyes looking haunted as he turned to spit out something vicious, “Abrumpo!”

The curse sliced through the entire wall, deep gouges in the stone and walls although Rowle manged to deflect it with some sort of shielding spell which created actual sparks.

Draco shuddered at the spell, head lolling for a moment before he recovered and kept sprinting.

“Go!” Daphne heaved, helping Theo with Millicent as they rounded another corner.

Astoria started to slow, her head and eyes burned.

There was something always really strange about Selwyn, that bothered her. Things that he knew that he shouldn’t, the strange look in his eye. He scared Daphne, he scared Astoria too.

Adrian Selwyn had made a man go mad when he went in to purchase a chicken- they didn’t know any insanity curses and even now she doubted Draco could perform any without passing out.

‘Mind Arts are dangerous,’ Astoria thought to herself quietly and forlorn.

Astoria stopped running once she turned around the corner, she pressed her body flat against the back of the stone. She closed her eyes, and stopped the heaving of her breaths.

The darkness swallowed her, and they swallowed the running sobbing noises of her friends who hadn’t realized her absence.

Daphne was going to be so mad at her.

Rowle turned the corner, so close that the warmth from his body made her skin burn. So close, she could smell the stink of his skin and the many days he had gone unwashed. His cloak brushed her legs, trialing against the tights that lined her calves.

Her eyes barely came to the defined line of his collarbone. She tilted her head up, and breathed.

Maybe it was the soft *whoosh* of her breath, but his eyes flickered downwards in surprise. His

mouth started to move, wand jerking from where it was aimed down the hallway- not at her.

Astoria's wand was pointed upwards, gently readied for now.

Her body trembled, and she shakily sobbed " *Legilimens."*

Thorfinn Rowle was a strange man, who had a strange life.

Pureblood and estranged, married into blood and sired by a woman who died from disease and stress. Raised by a brute who was weakened by loss and greed. He went to Hogwarts, he dueled and practiced in the night and mastered spells and curses and got a trophy from a dueling tournament for years back.

He killed aurors, killing curses raining down like meteors. He taught children, he murdered one of them as well when it was asked of him by the family. Illegitimate heirs were no heirs in the eyes of others.

He was invited by the Dark Lord himself, brought into power and brought into training to whip and *whip* the new recruits. He murdered two, because they couldn't ever be *weak* when he wasted his entire *life* to be strong.

He would never be weak he would never be *weak.*

He murdered a woman with his own hands, to feel her pulse stop in his palms.

He wanted to hurt *everyone,* like that weak bitch of his mother who died because of a *disease.* Like the fat arse of his father who was so greedy and gluttonous he stabbed him and peeled the fat away with his fingers.

He wanted to make the kid cry, he wanted to watch him fall apart because he was *pathetic.*

"I want you to teach me a spell. Something for combat, something strong."

His face spread into a vicious grin, adrenaline thrumming as his entire personality lightened. "Oh? Dealing some damage, are we?"

Adrian Selwyn's face didn't flicker, " *Something brutal."*

He saw the kids corpse, splayed sprawled out on the cobblestone with that blasted snake of his.

Rowle wish that he could have cooked him alive instead. Maybe then, that little bastard would have known *real* power.

If he stepped a little too hard on his bone and crunched a corpses' left hand, well...nobody could blame him in the end.

Astoria flinched back, took one step before her knees folded and she stared at a wall.

A body crumpled to the ground in front of her, but she didn't pay any attention to it. It was just a body, she'd seen a dozen and had *made* a dozen. She murdered and killed and Merlin how *great* it felt to watch cocky James Potter's neck rupture like a *goddamn geyser-.*

"Astoria!" Someone screamed, and it took her a second to remember that was her. She turned and glanced over her shoulder, not understanding why Daphne Greengrass was screaming and crying.

"You're okay?" Daphne blubbered, grabbing Astoria from her shoulder's to press her tightly into her chest, "What- oh god I was so *scared,* oh Merlin Astoria-."

" *Fuck,"* Draco hissed out in alarm and horror, he prodded Rowle with his foot, "Merlin he's still *alive?"*

"What?" Millicent croaked through the pain. Crabbe came around cautiously rolling the limp man so his face was exposed.

Blank, eyes open. Mouth breathing gently, nothing twitching and no recognition in his face.

"Oh god," Pansy mewled, skittering backwards, "Oh *Merlin,* what- what did she-."

"Legilimency," Astoria croaked out when finally her thoughts arranged like little folders in a great big cabinet, "I- he hadn't expected me. I'm sorry."

Oh god she was sorry. Oh god oh *god.* She had- she-.

She killed so many people and she laughed at them and she had seen Lily Potter screaming and there was so much blood and Adrian oh Adrian she made him cast spells and laughed as he writhed in agony-.

"I'm sorry." She repeated, hanging her head and twitching slightly. "I'm so sorry."

"It's okay," Daphne soothed shakily, "He, we're safe. I'm...I'm going to help you-."

"We need to get Greg." Crabbe blurted in a low rumble, "we're *getting* Greg."

"Go with him, Daphne." Theo panted, still holding Millicent with one arm, "Rowle's not going anywhere. Draco needs to help me with Millicent and get her to the Hospital Wing."

"I'm going to get someone." Astoria lied through numb lips. Corpses and blood and- *she was a monster.* "A teacher or someone. I'm going to get help."

Daphne looked torn, but she nodded, pressing a kiss to Astoria's forehead before she sprinted after Crabbe and Pansy back the way they came.

Astoria rose with a smile that felt fake. Her wand felt wrong- it *was* wrong. Draco looked at her worried- Lucius' boy, he looked positively *delicious* strewn out on the ground and crying in agony. It was always gorgeous when their voices cracked and-.

"I'm going to get help." Astoria repeated much calmer than she felt. She was a monster after all.

Adrian's corpse was still warm when Dumbledore walked past it quietly. He lay on his side, boiling and blistered and grinning in the face of death. His familiar lay sprawled beside him, limp and twisted into an unsettling sight. The dust had settled, a faint groaning of rocks and shattered

wood. Fallen bodies were on the ground, shrouded in black and faceless. The mindless allies of Tom, the ones that had been recruited out of desperation and hope for a better life.

Albus knew there was very little he could do. His strength was failing him even now, his hand numb and cold and his blood felt thick in his body. Even know, the distance loomed foggy and a question to all. He used to know so much, but now he was tired and he could think of only one action left.

He had ruined many things in his life, he had made many mistakes. Perhaps he could have changed it if he knew, but the world of *what-if* had long left him. It felt like an exchange, a wondering question of all the things he could have done better.

He had watched Tom sully the world due to his own flaws. He was an old man now, the current age was no longer for him to watch and advise.

Albus kept walking, until he reached near the fractured shattered wards of Hogwarts. They looked like shards from a mirror, broken and faint to his own eyes.

Albus slowly lifted his wand, and began to pull the strings of magic together the best he could. The strings of magic were sliced apart, but he could tie knots although mangled, to try and piece things together.

He worked, stringing the thrumming of the castle's soul together piece by piece until it glowed faintly. It reminded him of fawkes in a way, the glowing heat of something forever reborn. Was that what Hogwarts did? Forever living through the knowledge and safety she gave her students?

There was something special about Hogwarts, the way she lived sentient and cared for everyone in her walls. She sheltered them all, she protected them all. Her wards were broken, her walls turned to dust, and still, she stood to protect them.

"I am sorry, my old friend." Albus whispered to the castle herself, stringing protection through the air as his soul and magic pulsed gently in reverence, "for the pain I have brought on you."

She could not respond, but Albus had long since accepted this and instead bowed his head to her.

There was something magical about sacrifice, a magic old and as ancient as the trees and animals themselves. Not the sacrifice of slaughtering animals or humans, or burning food and flowers at a pyre.

The act of willingly giving something of value, for something worthy or more important than yourself. The whispered blessings, the opportunity to die with a smile on your face because it was for something more important- something that was more powerful than your entire life and meaning.

Albus hadn't understood it before, but he did now. He was an old man, he had made many mistakes. He was not immortal or wise or pivotal. He was not a martyr, hoping for others to take up arms in his wake.

Albus was a man, unimportant and average. He was old, he was tired, but the fate of others and the protection of the innocent was something beyond his own desires and love. Something beyond his own ambitions and self-preservation.

'I want you to stand tall,' Albus thought to the castle, *'because you provide meaning to others.'*

Albus smiled and stood tall, casting wards with a shaking hand. He smiled, and did not falter as

Tom returned and screeched at his figure. Albus did not falter, as Tom approached and rained fury and hate, because Albus had chosen something beyond Tom's understanding.

There was love of the physical world, and there was love that was unbound by time and space. A sense of admiration, of joy and glee. A love someone felt at the sight of soft clouds, at birds hatching from their eggs. An unconditional love at pebbles skipping over water, at deer chewing new grass.

It was a love that was limited by the limitless possibilities of life itself.

Dumbledore loved Hogwarts, and he faced death with a smile.

(Tom never could understand love, or the unconditional love of a sacrifice.)

Dumbledore chuckled gently, feeling serene as red eyes widened in confusion and rage.

"How dare you!" Tom shrieked, raising his wand like the poised strike of a cobra, " *face me!"*

Dumbledore smiled, and raised his arms beside him. Spread apart, like Fawkes' large wingspan. The wand in his old wrinkled hand hummed, begging him to shift into a stance and duel. To fight back, to defend against a threat and obey his instinctual cry of survival.

"Oh Tom," Dumbledore chuckled tiredly, "I have faced you all my life. You never deserved an opponent, you never deserved such scorn as a child."

Tom was confused, clearly crazed in the bloodlust that filled the air with iron. Albus' heart throbbed at the sight, at how even now Tom was confused in the face of kindness.

"Face me!" Tom screamed back, voice higher pitched and piercing, " *do not dismiss me!"*

Albus smiled fondly, "I would never. But I cannot stand aside Tom, you see, this castle is not something you can damage. She is a home to all who needs it, and a shelter to all who seek it."

Tom's lip curled, his hand tightened on his wand. His followers, flocking behind him over a wide berth watched with caution. It was obviously a strange sight, Albus Dumbledore- the only man who could stand against Lord Voldemort, refusing to fight.

"This is pointless!" Tom hissed in fury, " *martyrs* are lies! Only the pathetic die in such way!"

Albus chuckled tiredly, "oh Tom. I'm not a martyr. I know that my own life is less than that of something larger, and I would be willing to die for such thing."

Tom twitched and hunkered, skin pale and skeletal and eyes red and liquid.

"I am sorry, for all the ways I have failed you." Albus admitted shortly and bravely, "and I am sorry for all the troubles I have caused. Perhaps I am a fool, but I cherish something far greater than I, and *that,* Tom, you will never understand."

Tom screamed, and his mouth moved in the fated words.

The wards *boomed* as Albus' soul slipped away, energy joining the web of the world itself. It would not last- the dead were not meant to remain with the living, but for a few moments his heart and his life spread and fueled the object of his devotion; Hogwarts thrummed and her wards came alive, thick and strong. For now.

Under a barrage of spells and curses, it wouldn't hold out forever. Albus had known that, but he

would always offer his soul for the protection of one child innocent in the eyes of the world.

(It was an unfair bargain, and he knew he was a hypocrite. It would never atone for all he had done, but he would give his life any day for a few more moments of safety for an innocent.)

Astoria tilted her head and stared.

There were thestrals flying around. She had never seen them before until she had and she had murdered and killed and slaughtered and *laughed* and-.

“I’m a monster.” She spoke, calmly, accepting. People told her that, they screamed it at her and she smiled and the twisted their neck.

She was a monster, and like that basilisk she heard about, monsters deserved to be exterminated.

Astoria hummed, looking at the clouds and the sky. She didn’t feel the cold, or the breeze at the top of the tower.

She was a monster.

(She stepped forward.)

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry, truly. The subject and themes aren't one I wanted to write but given the...world we live in, I felt it would be wrong to not include it as reality.

Link to Antithesis Artwork

2 Chapters Left

Depression

Chapter Summary

The 5 Stages of Grief: DEPRESSION

Meaning and resolution has abandoned you, so in turn, you naturally abandon everything and anything life have given you. It's pointless now, or maybe it always was.

(Skylar has things to think now that it's quiet and lonely.)

Chapter Notes

You've followed me this far, my friends.
Thank you, for this strange path you've allowed me to carve out with my broken fingernails and sleepless nights.
Once more, for old time's sake.

Here’s the link to the fanmade Antithesis Playlist: it’s good background for your own slow death .

https://m.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLb9pKEdYmWjOyks3o36HdNcxcSMH4PlaO

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They cleared out the Great Hall, opening the windows to let the cold air in. It was warmed and warded, but it didn’t take away from the room itself. There were buckets filled with cleaning solutions, soapy water that had turned pink in the corner. The floor was covered with a thick canvas, double rolled over in a cover near the Hufflepuff table or where it used to be. If Skylar squinted, he could see small specks where congealed blood squished through.

It smelled bad in the hall, like antiseptic and vinegar. Madam Pomfrey was running herself ragged, tending to one side of the hall where linens and pillows splayed on the ground in a large infirmary. They were running low on potions, now tending to wounds and injuries with conjured bandages that didn’t fix some of the worst injuries. Cho Chang was whimpering over on one bed, her innards held in place by careful splints and heavy gauze.

Then there were the dead,

There were many of them, laid across the other side where the Slytherin and Ravenclaw table were pushed together. They were in various states, some laying calmly with eyes closed like they were sleeping. The ones that were caught off guard. The ones that had looked at the wrong monster at the wrong time, and then couldn’t look any further. The ones that took a killing curse to the chest, and fell to the ground with cut strings.

Then there were the gruesome ones, the ones where full limbs were missing or looked torn off. The

ones where the flesh had been removed and organs lacerated and they were given a waterproof white sheet for modesty. The ones with eyes open in surprise were one of the worst. The ones that were lax and still rattling from where they were laying next to another body.

Skylar had seen a lot of bodies, he had watched as Hagrid and Alastor fetched Dumbledore's body from the wardline, unflinching from the explosive curses within arms reach. They carried him back in, laying him shrouded in blue silk that shimmered like the night sky. He laid on his own podium, the Headmaster's spot, with Fawkes perched near his head and watching the world with dry eyes. Skylar imagined the bird didn't have any tears left to cry.

There was the basilisk corpse, larger than any dragon. Thick and wide, its entire eye was as large as Skylar's head. They couldn't move it, not when it wasn't affected by magic. It was sprawled out in a curled position, mouth open in a silent gasp for air. It was drooling slime, a thick mixture of acid and melting tissue that still pooled out from its nose and empty eye sockets. A House Elf had been considerate and propped up a bucket to catch the foul liquid. Its teeth were buffered with cantaloupes, forcefully covering each tooth to prevent an accidental poke.

It was beautiful in death, the way it must have been ugly in life. Everyone was too shocked to marvel over its horror.

People were crying, high pitched sobbing noises over near the corpses. He hadn't seen Mrs. Weasley in forever, but now he did; clutching the hand of Percy Weasley as he stayed in the state of nearly dead but not quite there. He gurgled, breathing slowly and too far between to ever come back. His skin had a concerning dark maroon brand across the neck and fingers.

Skylar couldn't remember the last thing Adrian said to him. He couldn't remember it, and he couldn't remember the original colour of his eyes. Only the white haze like molding grape juice. Blue in the middle; periwinkle.

What a cruel world, to tempt them with freedom and tear it away so sharply. Dumbledore was dead. Luna Lovegood was dead. Adrian Selwyn was dead. James Potter was dead.

Skylar hadn't even been told about that. He walked into the Great Hall, hazy and lost and saw the corpse of his father being held by his mother. Skylar never knew that a neck could be severed that way, a single slice thick and through like beheading a fish. His father died with his eyes closed, or maybe they closed his eyelids for him.

Skylar's mother cried, holding him close in her misery. Sirius was sitting nearby, head hung low in silent memory of their friend. IT bothered Skylar a little bit, how they were so damaged by death. Death had been around them for a long time- for all of Skylar's life. Skylar had known he was going to die for months now; why were they so devastated by something they should have expected?

But Skylar then remembered Adrian Selwyn, laying alone outside with nobody to cry over him.

Ron was sitting next to his family, whispering tearful goodbyes as Percy Weasley refused to die peacefully. Both twins were there- Skylar heard they had really given hell with their explosive fireworks. Hermione was over with Madam Pomfrey, whispering to the few that seemed they may make it.

"Oi," A low voice murmured, walking up from Skylar's side to stand carefully next to him. Skylar recognized him from before, standing next to him ready to face the gates of hell. Skylar hadn't realized that it was more like the River Styx, a small ship to sail across corpses.

“Hey,” Skylar croaked back, voice flat without expression. Theodore Nott didn’t look offended at all, if anything he looked more relaxed by it.

People were crying, Skylar felt like he was an outsider to it all.

“I’m sorry, about it.” Theodore Nott confessed quietly, shifting unsettled. “I was...I was one of the ones that helped take down Rowle. Not that it matters. Rowle was the one that got…” Nott paused, nodding his head over in the direction of Skylar’s family.

“You saw?” Skylar asked numbly. Theodore sighed through his nose, and that was all he needed to say.

“...Why are you helping me?” Skylar asked quietly.

Theodore ran one hand through his hair. “I feel guilty I guess. I was a shit friend. It doesn’t make up for it, but I can’t sit around.”

Skylar made a small hum in his throat. “Hermione said she felt guilty once. When we were running. She thought that...that since she made Adrian drag her to your dorm, she was the one that pushed you all into…”

“Treating him like shite?” Theo offered with a dry bark. The boy shook his head with a pinched expression. “No, she had nothing to do with it. Selwyn was a prick, he was a downright arsehole but he didn’t…”

Skylar swallowed, his eyes flickered to the hollow eye sockets of the basilisk’s eyes. Theo noticed, and didn’t say anything else.

“I hate that bloody thing.” Skylar choked out, sniffing and running the back of his hand against his nose. He stomped over to the basilisk head, nobody was around to tell him no. He pulled hack his foot, kicking out until the flat of his heel hit the root of the serpent's jaw. It took four more kicks, escalating in noises of frustration and hate until the tooth snapped free. It was still lodged in the cantaloupe.

Theo grabbed it, tossing the tooth and fruit with a blank face. With one twisted snarl of fury, the tall thin boy kicked the snake’s face near a nostril. It squished out more rank smelling slime.

“Alright,” Theo grumbled, chest heaving as he flushed in frustration, “come on. We’re not bloody leaving him out there.”

Without pausing, Skylar followed and the two boys left the Great Hall.

Some of the hallways had students in them, young first years hiding in alcoves where the suits of armor one stood. A few had blankets, curled up in various states of consciousness. Under the crushed rubble and destruction, they could see the start of a few pairs of shoes. Skylar didn’t know if there was anyone under it all.

Skylar hadn’t found Scamander yet, the old man was probably off alone somewhere pondering what chaos he had made.

They walked, Theo and Skylar padding down the single trail from the Great Hall to the Courtyard that was still stained in a single trail despite scrubbing. Skylar could imagine Adrian crawling along it, laughing in delight over the god he had killed.

“Here,” Theo muttered, tugging Skylar to the side as five girls ran past, sheltering one in the

middle who was crying and bleeding from her ears.

“Thanks,” Skylar whispered, walking out the closed doors and letting them click behind him. It was much colder outside, it was likely around nightfall now that it was winter. The day would continue still, long into the night. Skylar wondered if they’d keep fighting until every single one of them had been slaughtered like insects.

Nobody had touched Adrian, nobody had even approached him. There was an unpleasant side to death, where the muscles of the body relaxed and the digestive organs emptied themselves. Skylar couldn’t tell if the stink was from that or from the burned and slimy patches of skin. Adrian looked like one of those people who were fished out of a river, pale and grotesque and gaping at nothing.

“ *Fuck.”* Theo cursed, backing up to retch and vomit on the ground. He hadn’t seen Adrian up close. Skylar ignored him, and walked across the cobblestone before he dropped himself into an awkward seating position near Adrian’s head.

Lutain was splayed out, Skylar very shakily prodded and moved the cold scales into something less contorted. Lutain felt like overcooked pork.

“Fuck mate,” Theo started, voice broken and high pitched. Theo sniffed, rubbing his face viciously. Skylar folded his shaking fingers in his lap.

“I’m so sorry,” Theo choked out between his shaking breaths, “I’m so fucking sorry.”

“Do you know how to conjure a blanket?” Skylar croaked out, voice warbling uncontrollably. Theo fumbled with his wand; the blanket brought was patchy and thin in some spots, overly thick in others. It wasn’t overly warm but it was something Adrian didn’t have before.

“Help me get him on his back?” Skylar asked weakly. Theo helped him, they tried to ignore the way even on his back, Adrian’s sprawled position remained firm. He was like a statue.

“Fucker,” Theo cursed quietly under his breath, hand hanging suspected over Adrian’s left hand. It was shattered, crumpled from a boot. Someone had stepped on his hand after he died, crunching the bones together.

Skylar summoned water, used another shoddy blanket torn in strips, and began the painstaking process of cleaning the slime and gore off Adrian’s face. There was a concerning amount of it, especially with how toxic his body was although truthfully Skylar didn’t care anymore.

“They’re flocking,” Theo mumbled under his breath, watching black shapes that were skirting around them inside the wards, “I don’t- Potter. Potter do those things eat-..?”

Skylar looked up wearily, spotting the thestrals that glanced around the clearing curiously. A few were sniffing the ground, ears pressing flat to their skull as they came across the bodies of Voldemort’s troops, hidden in the rubble.

“There’s so many of them,” Theo cursed quietly, holding his wand ready if necessary, “go *away* you mangy crows-.”

“They liked Adrian.” Skylar slurred through numb lips. “They’re probably wanting to see why he won’t get up.”

One pawed the ground, Skylar shakily forced Adrian’s eyelids closed.

“I’m going to go get a broom and look around the grounds.” Theo broke the silence after they held

vigil. “Daphne’s been looking for her sister for a while now.”

“Astoria?” Skylar mumbled. Theo nodded, and got up to leave. The thestrals flapped their wings like geese, hopping around curiously as the taller boy made his way back into the castle. It was dangerous to be outside, especially the offensive front of curses clashed against the barrier like thunder. When it fell, Skylar would be the first to die.

Where else would they go? They had nowhere else to be.

“I’m sorry,” Skylar apologized although tears slipped down his face, “looks like you couldn’t kill me in the end. Seems shitty, that you go out like that.”

It was cold outside. Skylar felt like he was being watched by vultures.

“I’m so sorry.” Skylar squeezed his eyes shut tightly, “I- I we *knew* that…I’m *so* sorry Adrian. I...I didn’t...I knew you were going to but I...I thought I had more *time.”*

Skylar hung his head, and the noises he made sounded worse than the crash of curses on wards.

“I’ll, I’ll get you a nice funeral.” Skylar choked out brokenly, “w-with ah...lavender, and catnip. I...I *knew* that you...I was in your h-head for a while…”

Words didn’t flow right, he couldn’t think of the right ones in the oppressive silence. Curses smashed against the heavy warding surrounding the castle. Adrian was so still.

“...I’m so sorry.” Skylar whispered brokenly, “I... I should have done so much *more* but I...I know I couldn’t have and...I’m so sorry I fucked everything up.”

The thestrals were watching him oddly; like they were waiting for him to leave. Maybe that’s what they wanted, him to walk away so they could skitter forward and eat his corpse. Maybe that’s what happened to Umbridge.

“Potter!” Theo shouted, screaming more like. He returned from above, swooping with desperation instead of talent. It was reckless, Skylar would have scolded him if he had something in him to care. “Potter! Get your arse *up here,* now!”

Skylar didn’t know why, but the level of shrieking panic made him grab the broom that was chucked at him. He mounted it, lifting into the sky with muscle memory and no feeling. His hands felt numb around the wood.

“Shite shite,” Theo cursed under his breath, taking off and guiding Skylar somewhere off the courtyard, “ *shite!* I- I bloody found Greengrass’ sister.”

They passed over a bridge, the one that Skylar remembered Adrian used to sit at. There was a ravine below it, in the distance the grey shapeless mass of the partially frozen lake. Theo angled his broom downwards, twisting into an incredibly wobbly dive.

“Oh,” Skylar echoed distantly once he realized that they were going into the crevice, towards the bottom. “I’m not going to like this.”

Maybe it was the shock of everything that happened, maybe it was just how tired Skylar felt with it all that he didn’t complain when he hoisted a ruptured warm body on the broom in front of him.

The poor girl looked unsightly, Theo cursed under his breath hysterically muttering something about *'getting help'* over and over. Astoria didn't look as bad as Adrian did, but Theo instantly shucked his robe so the better of the two fliers could give her modesty.

Her warm blood seeped through the material, pooling against Skylar's throat and chest as they ascended. He didn't feel it.

Skylar walked inside the Great Hall, carrying Astoria in his arms although Theo had gone ahead and lightened her weight. He was muttering about the dangers of levitating her, since some pieces may fall off.

Something must have betrayed him, because the moment they entered the hall Skylar could see Daphne bolting towards them, desperation in her eyes.

The moment she saw that Skylar was carrying something shrouded in black, she started shaking her head and spreading tears.

"No no," She denied, running faster and screaming louder. "No! No! Astoria! Theo you found her who- *Astoria!"*

Maybe if Skylar could feel something right now, his heart would have broken.

Theo reached out, snagging Daphne around her middle, holding her back as Skylar made his way towards the right side of the Great Hall; towards where the dead were separated from the living.

"No!" Daphne screamed louder than a banshee, "Astoria *wake up! Astoria!"*

Theo was crying too, his head hanging. Pansy Parkinson had her face hidden in Draco Malfoy, who seemed permanently traumatized now.

"Astoria! Please! *'Storia wake up!"*

Skylar laid her down gently, and stepped back so Daphne could throw herself over her sister to protect her from the world. Skylar's neck was itchy from the blood drying.

Alastor walked up to him, sticking to the back of the Hall to watch over the grieving populace.

"You're not crying?" Skylar asked, knowing his face was blank and broken. Alastor gave a small grunt.

"Battle's not over yet." he stated simply, "Albus wanted me to hand these to you."

Alastor gave him something, a wand and something small. Skylar recognized it as the ring that poisoned the man, the wand he used to sacrifice himself.

"Did he say why?" Skylar asked quietly, taking the two objects to set in his pocket. He had forgotten that he still had the basilisk fang he set in there until it clicked against the ring. He had forgotten it although it was not that long ago.

"Said it was better in your hands than others." Alastor simply mentioned, crossing his arms to look throughout the Hall. "It's a terrible thing, ain't it? War."

Skylar hummed flatly and his eyes drifted over the nearby table. His mother was still there, Sirius

still crooning and holding his father's dead hands. He felt like an outsider, like those people didn't belong to him.

"Snape was doing rounds in the dungeons when he stumbled on Rowle," Moody explained, looking at Daphne who was sobbing out a nursery rhyme, or perhaps a lullaby. Her blonde hair was turning pink from where it brushed over the shrouded mass under her. "The man said he near had a heart attack when he found him. Completely brain dead, reckless thing too."

Skylar played with the wand in his pocket, tracing the strange rippled texture along the wand.

"See, mind arts are fickle things." Moody grumbled sympathetically, "dangerous. If you force too hard, you can tear yourself apart. If you break in too harshly, shattered bits will stick to you until you don't remember who you are. I heard rumors, that girl was natural born Legilimens. A pity."

Skylar's face twitched ever so slightly, "you think she did this to herself?"

Moody gave a dry pitying sound, "whatever left in Rowle's head sure gave Severus a scare. I reckon that poor girl lashed out, and went mad when she tried to stop. Mind Arts are something that ought to be illegal, sometimes the mind is worse than anything we can touch or break."

Skylar nodded and ducked his head, trying to not think of who else was going to fall.

"How's my mum?" Skylar muttered.

Moody glanced over and gave a small huff. "You feeling it too now?"

Skylar turned to look inquisitively at the man. Moody grinned, although the face looked more lost and sad than anything delighted.

"The disconnect." Moody elaborated waving one hand in the air. "You've seen shit, kid. You lose something from that, every battle everybody, you lose a piece of yourself and people expect you to come back from it. You don't not in the way others want you to and eventually you feel out of place in the worst of places."

Skylar blinked a few times, breath shuddering in his chest, "It doesn't get better, does it?"

"Most people go their whole lives, counting the times they ever truly felt panic on one hand." Moody explained after a small pause. "They can look back on it, remember it, learn from it and move on. It happened and it was an experience, but it's not like that for me and it's not like that for you now, kid. Maybe in ten years the brats that made it through today can think back on now and get worked up...but you and I? This *is* us now. It's hard to get it so deep in ya', it'd take more than a damn vivisection to cut it out."

Skylar exhaled in a shudder and nodded. "I don't feel like I should be here. I feel like...I mean, I'm not different than anyone else but I feel... *wrong,* being here."

Sirius had his head hung low, hands clasped between him over his dad's chest. The man's mouth was moving gently, maybe he was praying or mumbling. Skylar couldn't find it in him to walk over and kneel in vigil. He couldn't find it in him to face what he knew he'd have to with an audience.

"Yeah," Moody grunted roughly, "they teach you how to survive, and you all learn what you need to do to keep living. Nobody teaches you what to do after it all settles, when nobody is ready to kill you but you can't stop thinking about it."

Skylar's lip quirked. "Constant vigilance?"

"I bloody hate it." Moody said.

Skylar felt wrong, so he turned and left the Great Hall. Nobody followed him.

"I never thought much about death." Skylar confessed quietly. The blood on his robe had hardened into a crusty shell that made his arms and neck itch. "I mean, I had *thought* about it, but not like...death."

It sounded lame to his own ears, and Skylar's breath puffed in the air.

"I hope that we're just hand puppets to our souls or something," Skylar mused quietly, "although I wasn't sure how you'd take the whole *'hand-puppet'* idea. I figured you'd get a bit mad about that."

Adrian didn't move. Skylar missed the snarky comeback.

"You'd probably argue something about how...how my life was a joke already." Skylar weakly added in after a small pause, "no, no you'd call *me* a joke. That seems more like you."

The wand in his pocket felt cold, so Skylar pulled it out to fumble with. It was longer than what he was used to, he felt weird to have Dumbledore's wand.

"I found Astoria in the ravine." Skylar admitted quietly. "I think- well, Moody said that Snape said that she went insane. I don't like Snape, so I'm not sure how true that whole thing was."

The thestrals were still watching him from the corner of his vision, peering at him with milky eyes like Adrian's. The eyes reminded Skylar of the ring in his pocket, the way they reflected light and seemed just as endless.

"Death is weird to think about." Skylar confessed quietly. "It's...I don't know. It's finality? It's...It's like finishing a book. Flipping that last page and knowing there's nothing left. And you can read about the author or crummy book reviews but...it's over. It's...it's final?"

Skylar's voice was so small. He shivered slightly. The bang of the curses on the barrier sounded like bombs. Skylar wondered if this was what the London Blitz was like.

"It scares me," Skylar confessed in nothing more than a whisper, "what if there's nothing afterwards? Not...What if we're nothing and when we die, that's it? We're just...we're nothing, there's no existence anymore. We're just...a handful of homework assignments and old clothes and photographs?"

Skylar swallowed and looked over at Adrian regretfully, "I… I don't want *you* to be like that. But...but what if death is different? What if...is it like sleeping? Is that why Astoria stepped off and you're smiling?"

The barrier rattled with the force of the explosions, Skylar could already see the trace marks of where it was starting to crack.

Skylar shuddered and whispered very quietly, "...is it peaceful now?"

Skylar fumbled with the wand in his hand, looking over the cracks in the ground. "I have so many

regrets and I'm...I'm so sorry Adrian…"

Skylar hung his head sharply, "I know you're my brother or some shite, but...I don't know...I thought...towards the end that...that we were like family, you know?"

Skylar's lip wobbled, "you...you were like my one c-cousin I hated having over for Christmas dinner, b-because you'd keep going on about c-conspiracy theories…"

Skylar inhaled and exhaled with broken high pitched noises. His hands fisted in his hair, pulling at the roots until they hurt.

"I want you to come home," Skylar sobbed quietly into the crusty material of his robe, "I-I want you t-to c-curse out Sirius and...and be all...all high and m-mighty and...and I want you to l-live with Remus and...and you're my brother b-but I want y-you to be my *family,* n-not that…"

Nothing answered back, so Skylar tilted his head up towards the sky and *screamed* until his ears throbbed and rang and his throat felt raw.

Something small and dark in Skylar felt so loud in the oppressive silence, "I hoped that maybe when w-we die it's...we're united again, or we...we're *joined* or…"

Skylar felt a wrongness he always tried to ignore rise in his throat. He felt it on his tongue, like nutmeg.

"I kind of want to die," Skylar weakly confessed, "I'm really quite tired."

Skylar shifted his hand in his pocket, fingers pulling out the ring Moody gave him. It really was quite gorgeous, but it was too eerily similar to the thestrals swarming them.

Skylar traced the smooth face of the stone, rolling it over and over in his hand. It was cold, like the flat face of a crystal. Like a mountain stream from a source nobody could determine.

He felt cold, a sudden sharp flare of electricity which left him shivering. He could have sworn he saw his breath for a split second.

The thestrals skittered backwards, wings flaring in some display Skylar couldn't understand.

Skylar shivered, the barrier rattled under explosive curses and crackled ominously.

"I'm so tired," Skylar confessed, trying not to fall inwards on himself in fear of how he'd ever recover, "why couldn't I just die like you did?"

A pause, then, something rattling and hollow and *wrong.*

"I don't advise it," Adrian Selwyn spoke with a voice as smooth and gorgeous as rabies, "It bloody *sucks.* "

Chapter End Notes

Well.

Here we are.

The last chapter will be posted on Halloween (October 31st)

Link to Antithesis Artwork

Acceptance

Chapter Summary

> The 5 Stages of Grief: ACCEPTANCE
> It isn't about saying it's okay. It's not okay, it isn't fine. We begin to realize that the reality we live in now, is the reality we have to face. It may not be okay, but we know and we understand that what we love has left us and slowly, we learn to live again.

> "I think," Adrian started, eyebrows furrowing ever so slightly in thought, "that you should live a good story by helping other people write theirs."
> "What chapter are we on now then?"
> "The last one," Adrian grinned, "this is my finale."

Chapter Notes

> We made it, all of us.
> And in memory of those who passed away along the way.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing Adrian could think, was that the sunset was going to be especially pretty.

The sky was tinged dark, humidity high from how overcast it was earlier. Blood was in the air, thick in the air behind the putrid stench of acid. Adrian could imagine all the constellations that would sparkle so high in the sky, they would be especially gorgeous now that it was still winter.

He heard cursing, slurred and difficult to comprehend fully. Adrian grinned, his mouth splitting and peeling and stinging sharply despite it.

" *Fuck!"* Someone screamed, either in awe or shock. Adrian gave a raspy gurgling cough, thick mucus melting out of his mouth. He felt like an incontinent old man, unable to keep fluids inside of him.

"Hi," Adrian croaked out, struggling to get his eyelids to cooperate. Everything burned quite painfully in sharp pins and needles. Even breathing hurt, muscles in his chest twitching with harsh spasms that were crippling. "I lived, you arse."

Skylar's voice rose into hysterics, Adrian finally managed to get his eyelids to open fully. The sky above blinded him, although everything was hazy and smoggy through a noticeable blur. Adrian almost squinted, except everything on his face hurt.

"Oh bloody hell," Adrian gurgled out, "am I bloody blind? This is *bullshit,* I want a refund."

Skylar made a noise of choked laughter that sounded strangled. A movement, colour that was

separated from the other clouded mess. Adrian nearly sobbed in relief that he wasn't blind, although his eyesight was something to vomit about.

"Oh god, oh god." Skylar was repeating in a mantra, steadily rising in shrieking tones, "oh god oh Merlin-."

"Will you shut up?" Adrian groaned, trying to shift his joints from an uncomfortable position on his back. His bones snapped, his muscles shrieked in agony. He felt like a baby, being born anew and he wanted to *scream.*

"Yep yes, shutting up." Skylar was repeating now, swaying precariously from where he was kneeling near Adrian.

Adrian blinked, his vision didn't change much beyond the Gaussian blur that only determined differences in colour. He didn't know what he had been expecting.

"Oh god oh *fuck."* Skylar was babbling insanely, fingers digging sharply into Adrian's side. A sudden flare of agony left Adrian wheezing between clenched teeth. " *Merlin's goddam-* did someone *break* my bloody hand?"

His left hand throbbed on cue, reminding him that it indeed, was broken.

Skylar was babbling, and Adrian jerked, his entire arm snapping obscenely loud as he struggled into an upright position. His torso burned in agony, visceral pain that felt toxic, electrifying stew sloshing around in his stomach.

Adrian opened his mouth, then promptly vomited. Heaving, less effort other than an overwhelming amount of oozing fluid draining out of his mouth. His nose felt wet and wrong, as if everything was a giant clot.

Hands grabbed his shoulders, securing him in place as he gurgled weakly. Something jerked near him, unexpectedly moving and then Skylar was screaming again.

"Oh god oh god," Skylar was babbling hurriedly, "Oh *god,* Merlin please *please* have mercy this isn't fair this isn't *fair-."*

"Shut up," Adrian moaned pitifully, hunching forward into Skylar's shaking arms, "please shut up."

Skylar quieted his whimpers, but he was shaking even as hands curled and yanked painfully on Adrian's hair. Adrian's eyes slipped closed, he was so exhausted.

"You're dead." Skylar breathed shakily, something was twitching near Adrian's leg but he was too exhausted to try and squint through it all to see it. "I- you're *dead."*

"Turns out they don't take walk-ins." Adrian slurred into Skylar's robe. "Gotta...gotta book an appointment...inconsiderate pricks."

Skylar giggled hysterically.

The twitching started up again, Adrian groaned in annoyance as it violently jerked into his side.

"Oh my god okay," Skylar exhaled heavily, "so- so if I'm *not* insane, which I'm not so sure about right now-."

“Y’re not.” Adrian assured him tiredly, “been there, done that.”

Skylar made a high pitched whimper, “okay *not reassuring,* if- I- *what the hell Adrian.”*

Adrian grinned, teeth on display even though he knew Skylar couldn’t see it. “Didn’t ya’ hear? ‘M the Boy-who-lived, *asshole.”*

Skylar paused, entire body freezing before he threw his head back and *laughed.* Adrian felt the wetness on his head, and he certainly felt as Skylar curled inwards and pressed his face into Adrian’s gore matted hair and rocked them back and forth.

“Don’t *ever* do that.” Skylar babbled out, “you- you can’t ever do that-.”

“What? Die?” Adrian snorted although it made a glob of *something* come out. He rolled, cradling his broken left hand to his chest to sprawl on the other in a more secure position. Adrian’s head rested on Skylar’s thigh, his body sheltered between Skylar’s legs. “You think I’m *really* gonna live forever?’

To reiterate his point, Adrian coughed wetly.

Skylar hunkered over him further, “ *no,* you *never* get to leave me without saying goodbye again.”

Adrian’s chest twitched slightly, “ah, I killed the bitch, right?”

Adrian could almost *see* the unimpressed look on Skylar’s face, “yes, yes you did, but then the *head bitch* killed *you.”*

Adrian blinked quickly to try and clear the fog over his head, “what? You mean- *father* killed me?”

“I couldn’t imagine anyone who would want to kill you.” Skylar deadpanned more out of habit than viciousness. “You- *fuck,* you’re *alive.”*

“Hi,” Adrian mumbled with a wince, body hurting. “Being dead sucks.”

The thing near his leg jerked again, then very clearly, Skylar swore crudely.

On cue, something started moving almost coordinately.

Adrian grinned, “well, sonofabitch, you made it?”

“I hate you,” Lutain moaned out disoriented and small, *“I hate you so much.”*

“You don’t mean that, you love me.” Adrian countered shakily.

“You killed me, and then brought me back. I’m done, i need a break. A nice den. No, I know your words. I know what makes sense to you stupid creatures. Fuck you, Master.”

Adrian laughed until he choked.

“We should move you inside,” Skylar whispered quietly, unable to speak louder in the quiet of the moment. The barrier was starting to crack, large spindling marks that spread higher and higher. He knew Adrian couldn’t see it, but it bothered him nonetheless.

Adrian huffed, white clouded eyes staring upwards although they flickered on occasion. “You know i’m dying.”

He did. It was obvious even now, the oozing putrid smell had abated somewhat but Adrian was still a horrible sight. Broken cracked skin that clotted into small dotted marks. Bruising all across his body from hemorrhaging. His nose looked like something had melted out then had been shoved back inside. Skylar thought the boy’s tooth had fallen out at one point.

“You could have a pillow, get comfortable.” Skylar offered quietly, unable to let the boy in his arms go. “A blanket maybe.”

Adrian hummed quietly and stared upwards into the sky. “Nah, I didn’t come back for that.”

Skylar’s body jerked ever so slightly, “you...you got to choose?”

Adrian’s mouth twisted into a small fond smile. “Yeah. I had unfinished business.”

Skylar blinked quickly, “I- what? What could you possibly have left *here?”*

Adrian’s face closed off slightly and he rolled one shoulder in a shrug. The sun was lowering, it was going to be a beautiful sunset.

“Ah, there she is.” Adrian mumbled quietly, tilting his head in the direction of the dozens of thestrals that still hadn’t left them alone, “come to look at your roadkill?”

A thestral clopped out from the edges, the largest of the herd. It tossed its head, looking familiar although Skylar couldn’t place it. They all looked pretty similar to him.

Adrian chuckled at it, like it said something funny. He curled his right hand, the only one that moved properly, and flipped the horse off. It was aimed a little to the left, but still obvious enough that the horse could understand it.

“Yeah, thought so.” Adrian mumbled, eyes closing again. “Where’s the others?”

Skylar glanced away and chewed on his lip. “Dumbledore died.”

Adrian stilled after a small moment, “no, really? Damn, wish I could have seen it.”

Skylar exhaled shakily, “don’t worry, you drama queen. You still showed everyone up.”

“Glad to hear.” Adrian mumbled, eyes slipping closed as he reclined fully against Skylar. “Why aren’t you with your friends and family?”

“I am.” Skylar blurted without hesitation.

Adrian stilled, “...ah.”

There was a rumbling bang as another spell hit the barrier. Adrian was smart enough to know the sound, and know that it was something bad. He still didn’t move.

Lutain was laying curled, uncoordinated and confused. Skylar didn’t understand it, maybe somehow the killing curse only broke off a segment of soul and somehow stole the horcrux. Then it wouldn’t explain how the hell Adrian came back to life, unless-.

“Oh my god.” Skylar breathed in horror, “Oh my *god.* You- I- Adrian the *bloody prophecy.”*

Adrian made a small noise of annoyance, “that shite? Really?”

“No no, the phrasing.” Skylar stressed quietly, “ah.. The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches, born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies. And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not, and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives. The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies!”

Adrian hummed under his breath, “and you still forget how to be intelligent.”

Skylar tried not to laugh at the insult, “no no, Adrian, *listen.* The prophecy! He marked you as his equal but what if that *was* the power he didn’t know about!”

“The power was friendship.”

“Shut the hell up oh my god how are you this bad and you were *dead.”*

Adrian peeked open one horrifying eye, “my point. I just died, let me have this.”

“Don’t you get it!” Skylar blurted exhilarated, “you were a horcrux!”

“A *what?”*

“A- no! Nevermind! You completed the prophecy! You turned Voldemort mortal!”

Adrian frowned before he shrugged, “he killed me, fuck him.”

Skylar laughed hysterically, running one hand through his hair, “oh god, oh *Me rlin,* we have a chance. He...we have a bloody *chance…”*

“Skylar,” Adrian cut in sharply, “what’s your philosophy on life?”

The topic change was sudden and left Skylar scrambling on the shreds. He could tell that whatever this was, it was important for Adrian, so it was important to him.

The barrier banged, and Skylar ran his hand through Adrian’s hair. Lutain lethargically curled closer, into the warm cushion of Skylar’s hip and stomach.

“I...I don’t know?” Skylar confessed weakly, “I just...I feel happy when I have that sense of purpose that comes from doing good things. I guess I just...I don’t know, I don’t know the minds of other people, so I just...tried to be the best I could be for everyone? Everyone deserves a second chance, and people do what they can with what they have.”

Adrian hummed, “what about the assholes?”

Skylar laughed quietly, “I made friends with *you,* didn’t I? I think that...a lot of people are like you, wherever you are. Fumbling around or just waiting to find some sort of meaning, so I just...I do what I can to make people happy, and it brings me joy.”

Adrian relaxed, Skylar’s hand scratched gently over scalp.

“I can’t imagine a life without those moments,” Skylar confessed, “without making people smile, or helping people whenever I can. I think that’s why I always wanted to help you, because I could tell you needed it.”

“I needed help?”

“You needed happiness, and I like to think maybe somewhere along the way I made you happy for a little bit?”

Adrian didn’t respond.

The barrier rang out eerily, the shattering marks were spreading.

“I want to be remembered.” Adrian whispered quietly, strained and very vulnerable, “I wanted to be important, but I think it was because I was afraid people would forget me.”

Skylar helped Adrian as the latter tried to sit upright, stumbling to a wobbly kneeling position. The thestrals flocked, skittering around nervously as Lutain leant on Skylar’s one side and Adrian on the other.

“I wanted to be someone people thought of,” Adrian grinned, glancing over at Skylar with a look he had seen hundreds of times before. A wide grin, curved and sharp and breathless. Eyes wide and wild, a challenge in the slight flush on his skin. *‘You ready?’* he asked without words, even as he needed someone to help him upright and his eyes clouded and he was dying with every breath.

“I think,” Adrian started, eyebrows furrowing ever so slightly in thought, “that you should live a good story by helping other people write theirs.”

Skylar’s mouth felt dry. “What chapter are we on now then?”

‘You ready?’ Adrian’s face asked in an echo of everything. A shadow of youth, of trauma and battles and sorrows and everything he had ever been.

“The last one,” Adrian grinned, “this is my finale.”

The barrier rang, then shattered in something opalescent.

Voldemort walked forward calmly with the fury of a restrained hurricane. Every step he took closer to the castle, the death tally added.

His army walked at his heels, low and submissive in his wake. All of the country would crumple under his rule, they already had lost.

He hadn’t anticipated the old man sacrificing himself, a branch of magic he never understood and never pretended to know. The idea of sacrifice and love was beyond him, and it was weak. Even now, he walked across the shattered remains of Albus Dumbledore’s great desperation.

Once he swarmed the castle and murdered every living soul there, he would reclaim the Elder Wand off the man’s corpse, and raze the castle to the ground. The last monument of resistance would be destroyed, and it would be the pyre that burned every opponent he had.

Most of all that bastardized chaotic creature he had foolishly brought to his side.

Voldemort walked across the main entry, shattering the gates like the ribcage of an infant. The castle wards groaned under his touch, wilting and burning.

Nobody would *ever* resist him again.

He would slaughter *everyone.*

Adrian tilted his head and chuckled slightly when the barrier fell. Skylar felt his heart leap to his throat, dizzying his head.

“I guess he got through then?” Adrian croaked out, his body weight moving as he struggled to his feet, “well, guess this will be a good surprise.”

“You can’t-” Skylar fumbled, jerkily holding the boy in place while keeping Lutain carefully on his shoulder. “Adrian you *can’t.”*

Adrian huffed and tried to rise further. There were voices increasing in volume, fleeing from the castle as a last line of defense. “Why not?”

Skylar exhaled quickly, “you’re *blind-.”*

Adrian huffed, “then be my eyes.”

Lutain tightened around Skylar’s neck, Adrian’s arm around his shoulder squeezed. Skylar’s heart pulsed loudly, and beyond it all, Skylar couldn’t find it in him to protest.

“Now you’re getting it.”

Lutain squeezed, and Skylar swallowed. He adjusted his hands to loop under Adrian’s arms, hoisting the scarred boy into a shaky standing position. Adrian laughed breathy, scrambling with his right hand and his left elbow- the broken hand curled protectively in front of his chest. His feet touched the ground, they stood facing the broken gates of hell.

“This is going to be fun,” Adrian exhaled, his right hand shakily fumbled along his left forearm, pulling out a wand from a holster originally out of sight.

“Oh my god this is a disaster.” Skylar whimpered, trying to hold himself upright with how precariously balanced this was.

“No,” Adrian wheezed out with something like a laugh, “the disaster is just you.”

Lutain chuffed and moved in a small rhythmic undulating Skylar knew was laughter.

The doors to the castle behind them opened and the waves of defense ran out, skittering and gasping with audible noises of horror and confusion.

Skylar couldn’t understand individual words in the large roar of noise, generally they were along the lines of confusion or disbelief.

“Surprise!” Adrian croaked out, unable to get his voice to get to a high enough volume to be heard by everyone.

Moody was in the front, looking at the two boys standing there. His single magical eye bugged out so far it almost fell from its socket. Then he threw his head back and *laughed.*

Sirius Black poked his face out, looking grim and cruel. The moment he saw the two standing, his face paled in shock before he was shrieking out *“What the bloody fuck?”*

“Selwyn?”

“What! No! It has to be someone else!”

“Is that bloody Selwyn?”

“You ruddy kidding me?”

Someone in the back jumped, a student with messy hair who began shrieking in laughter. “Selwyn you prick!” Pansy Parkinson howled like a banshee.

Adrian looked them over, face grizzly and disgusting and causing many to look away. He winked, even though he couldn’t see it.

Sirius Black barked out a laugh, shaking his head in disbelief, “You lived?”

Adrian grinned and didn’t respond, grinning aimlessly towards where he knew the broken gates were.

Lutain tightened on instinct, tongue flickering through the air with small noises. Skylar noticed how Adrian corrected his posture without thinking, changing the way his body was positioned to face the threat fully. Skylar smiled through the adrenaline in his blood.

“You know you’re likely not going to survive, right?” Adrian asked casually.

Skylar shakily nodded, not trusting his own words.

Slowly, the swarm of black approached.

Skylar would never forget the look on the Dark Lord’s face the moment he saw and realized what had happened.

Voldemort had always been some sort of chaotic entity, something beyond understanding. Skylar could never imagine living with it, or the creature somehow being anything but mortal. He always seemed confident, proud and arrogant and powerful.

Now, there was nothing but outright obvious shock and *fear.* Adrian couldn’t see it, but Lutain’s tongue kept flickering and slowly the boy looked more and more confused.

The Death Eaters swarmed, caught sight of Adrian, and fell back in a mess of shapes and bodies and slowly a circle surrounded them. Skylar and Adrian in the center, the Hogwarts defenders behind and the Death Eaters. Whispers were filling the sky with noise, and Adrian had the gall to smile.

“I don’t want anyone else to try to help.” Adrian croaked out, Skylar shakily hurried to amplify his voice with a shaking wand, “It’s got to be me.”

Voldemort hissed in a noise serpentine. His eyes wide and nearly glowing red. Face twisted into something unreal and warped, molded from hot wax.

“You don’t mean that,” he hissed out in a shrill warped voice. “That isn’t how you work, is it? Who are you going to run away from today? Who are you going to leave to die this time, *brat?”*

Adrian tilted his head ever so simply, constantly adjusting to ‘look’ in the proper direction. “Nobody.” He stated simply.

Voldemort’s teeth pulled back into a snarl before he cackled loudly, “look at you, taking instructions from a *worm.* You’re *pathetic,* are you blind? Did you do that to *yourself?”*

Adrian rolled his eyes, which was an impressive feat considering his eyes looked like moldy cottage cheese. “I slaughtered Adalonda.”

Voldemort stiffened in surprise before he carefully resumed, shifting into a slow pacing. Skylar cursed quietly, trying to twist and tug Adrian along with him so they weren’t facing the wrong direction.

“How’d you do that?” Voldemort almost crooned playfully, “who did you sacrifice as *bait?”*

Adrian *huffed,* amazingly not annoyed by the intrusive and terrifying banter between them. “Wow, I know you’ve always thought so little of me, father, but I actually *did* kill her. Really bloody satisfying too.”

Voldemort’s eyes flashed in rage before he composed himself. “It matters not, you are a *child* and I am a *god!”*

Adrian rolled one shoulder, clutching the wand in his grasp a little tighter. “Before you try to kill me again, I’m going to let you think about what you’ve done...About what you’ve really done.”

Voldemort nearly gaped, “ *what* is *this?”*

Of all the things Adrian could have said, nothing shocked Skylar more than that. Adrian held firm, not seeming bothered at all even at his request. Skylar saw Voldemort’s pupils constrict to thin slits, the skin around his eyes whiten further.

“It’s your last chance,” said Adrian simply with a small tilt of his head. “It’s all you’ve got left...I thought I should give you a second chance, or maybe a third or fourth. I know it…”

Adrian licked away the gore on his lower lip before he continued through with a stronger voice, “...It may seem a bit *silly,* but I’ve been thinking it through a long while. Here’s your chance to be something better than the monster you are.”

Voldemort shrieked in rage, “you *dare* offer *me* a chance? *I will kill you!”*

Adrian huffed. “You already did! But look who is standing and *oh* you must be *furious.* What are you going to do! Are you going to *think* about the shit you’ve put me through? Are you going to *think* about the monster you are? You may be my father, but you are *not* my dad!”

Adrian’s teeth clenched and then he spat out words with more venom than the rotting basilisk. “I *have* a dad and he *saved me* after you *broke me!* I have friends that your own fucked up regime ruined! I had a life, that you *stole from me,* and you are going to know that!”

“I owe you nothing!” Voldemort screamed in fury, “you should have been murdered as a child! I should have never let you live!”

Adrian smiled softly, his head tilted ever so gently.

“If I were a monster, like my father...Would you kill me?”

Remus didn’t hesitate. “Never.”

“So that’s your choice.” Adrian whispered gently, and Skylar swallowed and adjusted himself. “I am sorry that something as wretched as you ever lived.”

Voldemort snarled silently, lifted his white wand, and his lips moved.

Adrian clued in the moment Skylar tensed, and he lifted his wand pointing in the general direction. Lutain jerked, coiling and shifting until his cold scales adjusted his aim. Adrian didn't falter, trusting his familiar and Skylar, and with a whisper of the dead, he spoke *"Avada Kedavra."*

Vitaedax are special things.

They weaken your soul, munching on the pathways until you're weak and dying. The soul, our magical pathways help determine the flow and strength of our magic. The shorter our pathways, the less distance for magic to travel before usage.

Adrian, on death's door and accepting his fate, released his magic like the collapse of a dam. The floodgates opened, and bright green shot across to impact a similar spell.

Maybe in a fight, Voldemort would have won. Voldemort was a superior wizard in all sense, more intelligent, more skilled. His flaw, was his innate dismissal over Adrian's health. Maybe if he knew, if he had *asked* about the parasite, he would have realized Adrian would only have one, incredibly overpowered spell in his arsenal. He could have countered, he could have transfiguration a rock into a barrier and then, Adrian would have died.

Voldemort wasn't one to care for others. He was a selfish, egocentric man who manipulated others and failed to realize the threats others posed. He fired a powerful killing curse, and faced a year's worth of terminal illness and grief and *disease.* It was luck, it was coincident and it was *luck,* but the spell from Adrian's wand was fueled by the blood cascading down his chin and the scarred emptiness in his eyes and the memories of a lifetime of trauma.

A flood consumed a man, the riptide tugging on legs and bones until the ocean swallowed him and left nothing behind but ash and corpses.

Adrian tilted his head, legs giving out as the pores along his brow began to ooze pin prick marks of red. Skylar remembered Scamander telling him in hushed whispers a lifetime ago what would happen. How eventually Adrian would start bleeding until there was nothing left to give, the parasite's last attempt to infect someone else.

Skylar didn't have any open wounds or sores where he could be infected from. Adrian panted, heaving in dry hollow sounding gurgles, and his skin dampened and he sweat blood.

"Oh god," Skylar breathed out, stumbling over the limp weight of Adrian, "Adrian? Adrian stay with me- *Adrian?"*

Adrian huffed, head bowing as he panted. Sweating, dripping from his chin onto the dust under them. "...Did it work?"

Skylar's breath caught at the sight of Adrian crying, looking like some sort of biblical figure.

"I hope it did," Adrian babbled weakly, paling far too quickly to be healthy. He looked ready to faint.

A thestral came close, and people started to *scream.* Death Eaters running desperately or standing to fight against those that swarmed forward. Skylar could hear a few voices, people rushing towards him to take the weakened body from his arms.

Lutain moved, uncoiling and the thestral tugged too close, shadowing them in its wings. Thick and large, leathery membrane of black- and then Adrian was *laughing,* a high pitched noise- and he was being moved.

“Wait!” Skylar lunged forward, breath leaving him as he slammed into something large and muscular. A thestral’s flank, intercepting him as the swarm of leather and skeletal horses pulled him away and- “*Adrian!”*

A swarm of hands on his skin, on his shoulders tugging him back away from the flocking herd. They moved like stampeding animals, the largest one that Skylar saw earlier- the one that had lived near Remus and Tonks’ house, opened its large wings and flapped into the sky with a small figure on its back.

“No!” Skylar screamed, struck with the horrifying possibility that Adrian would be gone forever- that he would vanish on this creature’s back in a dramatic show.

It didn’t fly off, instead it flapped upwards through the air laboriously until Skylar could think of only one destination where it could be flying.

Skylar backed up, bumping into a few bodies that were trying to grab him, trying to lift him in celebration. He saw Sirius, met his eyes at one point. There was some sort of understanding in the man’s eyes, the way they scanned through the crowd before he forced his way through the waves of children.

His godfather grabbed Skylar’s arm gently, tugging him through the crowd fast dozens of faces. Terrified and horror struck Hermione, blank faced Ron. Ecstatic Pansy leaping for joy, Neville Longbottom on the ground in throes of a panic attack.

He saw Theo, staring upwards in the direction of the broken covered bridge. He was looking aimlessly, unseeing really. He was crying, a small smile of gratitude. He looked like he was saying goodbye.

Skylar’s breathing broke in a crackle, and once Sirius finally guided him through the crowd, Skylar ran and didn’t stop.

He bolted up past figures and shapes. He barely recognized Professor Slughorn who looked far too shocked to be happy. Severus Snape, weeping tears of relief hidden in the shadow of a window. He sprinted up steps where the Twins were both leaning on the railing of the staircase, heads hanging in quiet mourning.

He could hear the sobbing screams from inside the Great Hall, the loud piercing wails of Daphne Greengrass barely covered the small whispers of reassurances to those leaving life.

Skylar ran upwards, higher and higher until his legs burned in agony. He ascended, the walls getting lighter as more windows crossed his path. Portraits absent, the noises fading away below him. He ran up and up, ascending towards a single destination.

He burst through into the light of the slowly setting sun. The air was fresh, untouched by dust and rubble. The light sharp, clean; the bridge was broken only a half dozen meters out over the gorge.

There wasn’t anything there, but the small broken figure sitting next to the edge of the busted path. Legs folded disturbingly around him, a small puddle of blood spreading every time he shifted to smear it further. Adrian looked out at the scenery, tracing the mountains and lake and the trees with his eyes from memory alone, unable to see it but knowing it well enough to never forget it.

“You’re never going to give me some peace, eh?” Adrian croaked out. He sounded much much worse than Skylar thought he would.

“You love the attention.” Skylar numbly responded, unable to walk forward and break it.

Adrian chuckled softly, fingers tracing the stone.

“You know,” Adrian whispered, “I really missed this view.”

“I’m sorry you can’t see it.” Skylar weakly offered, finally taking two steps out.

Adrian’s hand stilled before he tapped the rock gently. “I don’t need to see it. I used to sit up here almost every day. It helped me think. It reminded me that I was small, that I didn’t need to be something to still exist.”

Skylar’s heartbeat was loud, thrumming in his throat. Adrian tilted his head slightly, listening.

A thestral approached them- a new one. Not the large scarred body that kidnapped Adrian before, but one Skylar had never seen. It was small, although still hunkered over him by loads. Its wings were long and graceful, untorn although its hooves were far too large for its body. It flapped, forcing its wings in gentle figures as it made its way closer, legs kicking out to run along the stone as it landed gently. It was a strangely childish display, awkward and clumsy and unique.

Adrian laughed, a hoarse bubbling noise. He threw his face back, entertained at the very new creature. Skylar *knew* he had never seen this one before in his life.

“I wondered when you’d get here.” Adrian said. “I’m sorry I took so long.”

The thestral *timidly* approached, almost catlike. It wobbled towards the edge where Adrian was seated, struggling to lower itself gracefully. It ended up dropping onto its belly and side with the click of bones on rock. It looked like a dog, sprawled out half on its side.

“There you go,” Adrian murmured under his breath gently, reaching out with a trembling red stained hand to trace the bones of the creature’s front humerus. It’s vertebrae stuck out on its long dragon-like neck, its bright white fangs looked new.

Adrian lent back against it chest, tilting his head towards the side to look out at the ravine and lake and everything else.

Skylar felt like he was intruding on something so peaceful and perfect, something so gorgeous and private.

“Aren’t you going to say hello?” Adrian grumbled out, closing his eyes gently as he reclined back against the omen of death, “that’s rude, even for you.”

Skylar floundered, mind scrambling to think.

Thestrals were...were *made?* They were made from children who...who had died horrible deaths. Who would...he…

“Oh,” Skylar’s mind screeched to a halt, a memory of wet fluid and a wide eyes knobbly legged foal with feet too large for its body. Stumbling around, away from a body who- “...I-...L-Luna?”

The thestral turned its head ever so slightly, there was no way to disguise the slightly protective tilt of its massive skull near Adrian’s face.

“There you go,” Adrian whispered, although Skylar wasn’t sure if it was to himself or the creature.

“I…” Skylar’s breathing fumbled, “I...Thank you. For everything.”

Adrian opened his eyes, half lidded. They stared like fermenting fish. He shrugged, “it’s not easy to

find someone infected with a super dark parasite. Once in a lifetime."

Skylar smiled and took a step forward. Merlin, Adrian was looking almost translucent.

"Yeah, you better slow down, Mr. Dark Lord." Skylar's voice broke halfway through, warbling uncontrollably.

Adrian laughed a small noise.

Skylar's smile started to falter, then it broke completely.

"Oh my god." Skylar whispered in awe, "I- oh my *god."*

"What?" Adrian asked lazily, Lutain uncoiling from his shoulder to lay across his lap docile, "you find those missing brain cells?"

"No, the prophecy." Skylar breathed out, ignoring how Adrian groaned at the sound of it again, "Adrian I was...what...what if the prophecy...wasn't *just* about V-Vold-."

"What," Adrian moaned out annoyed, "there's *another* big bad Dark Lord run- no. *No.* You are- *what is the prophecy tell me right now."*

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches, born to those who have thrice defied him-."

"There!" Adrian victoriously interrupted with a crooked smile, "that's already- *aw shite.* Bloody- *for fucks sake."*

The thestral exhaled heavily, and Adrian shakily rubbed his face.

"Alright, shite." Adrian grimaced, "I...I went and screamed at your parents a while back, and ah...shite what was- yeah thanks Lutain, Mylla said that they...betrayed me three times. Once as a kid, second as teachers and third as parents."

Skylar grinned exhilarated, and Adrian almost laughed at how ridiculous it all was.

"...Born as the seventh month dies- which works for *both of us."*

"Please, shut up."

"...And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal...does that mean like, the Dark Lord like, your *father* or like, *you* marking *me* as your equal somehow or-."

"Please, just…" Adrian wheezed out pained, "keep going."

Skylar frowned, but obliged. "...But he will have power the Dark Lord knows not, and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives."

Adrian closed his eyes and thumped his head back against the thestral (*Luna,* he had to remind himself.)

"I want you to take Lutain." Adrian croaked out, ignoring how the snake startled in alarm, "I don't trust anyone else. I don't know what *happened* , Merlin knows this little centipede should be dead but *apparently* he defied killing curses also...I want you to take care of him when I'm gone."

Skylar swallowed thickly, then sat down heavily. "Oh my god, oh my *god,* it meant *horcruxes.* Shit

you- he- *oh my god."*

Adrian sighed and resigned himself to not understanding. Skylar proceeded to rub his face in shock, "the...the prophecy was about *us,* the *entire time."*

"Yeah, about that," Adrian croaked out sourly, "I'm going to ignore everything you just said. Is that Dumbledore's wand?"

"Yeah!" Skylar fumbled to pull it out, accidentally yanking the basilisk fang (he forgot he was carrying with him) out onto the ground. It clattered loudly, and Adrian tilted his head at the noise.

"Lutain what is-...a...a basilisk fang?"

Adrian's voice tilted up dangerously at the end.

Skylar looked at him, and felt horrified at the strangely hopeful expression on his face.

"Sky?" Adrian asked quietly, innocently. He was chewing on his lower lip, he was shivering, he...Skylar can't…

"Oh god," Skylar whispered, unable to drag himself closer.

He was watching Adrian die.

"I...There's a curse, for thestrals." Adrian explained quietly, "if...if you die f-from basilisk venom, you turn into a thestral...I…"

Adrian's eyes welled with bloody tears, "...I don't want to be alone again in that. I...Sky?"

Oh god please no, please no-

"Can you kill me with that?"

Skylar inhaled and bit his tongue and squeezed his eyes shut because he knew, that he couldn't say no.

"This isn't *fair!"* Skylar exploded, shaky hands grabbing the fang. "It...I- I can't-."

"Please?" Adrian whispered gently, staring off over the valley and lake and mountains. "I don't want to be alone anymore."

Skylar couldn't say no.

"You're supposed to kill me," Skylar blurted impulsively, "we had a *deal."*

"Not sure if you noticed," Adrian wheezed, "but I'm dying now."

Then, Skylar thought of a truly terrible idea.

"You're right." Skylar spoke, voice thick and understanding. He stood up, picking up the fang to walk closer to the boy. He sat down carefully, "you can't murder me, but you *can* kill me."

Adrian's face twisted in confusion; Skylar transfigured a nearby chunk of rubble into a cup, and dragged it through the shallow drippings of Adrian's mess.

Adrian gaped as Lutain hastily explained what was going on, then *laughed* as Skylar gagged and

infected himself. As the parasite wiggled itself free, spreading from not one, but two hosts. Two hosts, which it would torment for the rest of their lives and ruin what soul they had left.

“Oh Skylar,” Adrian laughed although it sounded pained, “you don’t know what you’ve done.”

“Then tell me.” Skylar challenged. “Tell me everything.”

“Okay,” Adrian agreed with a bloody grin. Skylar reached out, and handed the basilisk fang over.

Adrian started to talk.

“ I’m going to tell you a story, although it’s a bit long. I’m going to make you listen, because I want you to understand every single way you have made me into this bloody monster. I’ll call this story antithesis, and you’re going to learn every single moment where things went wrong. I want you to cry, and beg for me to kill you, and when I’m done with this, you’re going to want to do that to yourself. You’re going to listen, because in the end, you owe me that much. You owe me *so much more,* but here we are, and this is how it’s going to end. Who knows, maybe this useless battle between you and me and this bloody world, well, maybe we always *were* fated to kill each other.”

There was something fascinating, about Vitaedax. About a simple little parasite which drove humans to insanity.

Not many things infected the soul, or managed to warp it beyond recognition. A dementor could remove it, a selkie could sense it.

A thestral was born from it.

A vitaedax *destroyed* it.

What a strange thing, for a parasite which survived by gnawing and shredding soul and soul connections, to find itself suddenly assaulted by basilisk venom and exposed to a very unusual curse. What a strange thing, for a vitaedax to chew and gnaw and feast until something, *something* gave way.

What a strange thing, when thestrals began to drop, when their leathery bones started melting and the Elder Wand split in two over a core which fizzled out of existence.

The vitaedax kept feasting, because a curse that transformed soul was never a match for a parasite.

What a strange thing- no.

What a *silly thing.*

Chapter End Notes

An epilogue, to finish this story and finally lay our demons to rest.

Link to Antithesis Artwork

Link to Discord Server where you can scream at me in person

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

A tragedy is defined, as having an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of the main character.

If I have learned anything, from all the teachers who doubted me and the people who dismissed my capabilities; when you are the author, you can make something proper, or you can make what is *right*.

Chapter Notes

This story is dedicated to Ani, without whom I would be without friendship and loved ones, and this may never have finished.
This story is dedicated to Ahuuda, who talked with me about the world and reminded me that I am small, but I am in no way unimportant.
This story is dedicated to Ruby, who reminds me that my impact transcends time or boundaries set by man.
This story is dedicated to Arc, who made sure I knew that age has no limit.
This story is dedicated to Nelchael, Jamie, LittleMiss, and Wolf, and *so many others*, who convinced me to think and imagine and be confident even when I didn't want to.
This story is dedicated to Kelsey, who although we have grown apart in all senses, helped me find my footing and put the first sentences to paper.
This story is dedicated to Pandy, who slept at my side and listened to my chatter, and whose urn keeps me company even now.

This story is dedicated to the reader; I hope you find happiness.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Skylar cheered when Remus managed down the porch steps all on his own one nice April morning. He walked down the steps, wobbling a little, but able to walk all on his own.

“Watch out!” Skylar cheered happily, clapping his hands dramatically as Tonks guffawed loudly, “you’ve got a lady killer on the loose!”

Tonks laughed so hard, her face flushed red and her hair matched it.

She was due any day now, but it didn’t matter. Life was...it was *better.*

The international relations apparently soothed themselves over, various shell companies and international deals came to light with the sudden shift of political leadership in the wake of Voldemort’s death. The great food shortage ended when huge amounts of produce was shipped in from where it had, quite literally, been going to rot. It was...horrifying, to see the full manipulations

of everyone.

Investigations were being put into place for the various muggle and muggleborn murders during the recession, although Skylar honestly doubted anything would come of it until well into the next decade. Hermione already had been told various possible academic options to try and keep her out of the public eye- she most likely would be a target in the upcoming summer since there were huge swarms of Voldemort supporters still incorporated into society.

Lutain was an...an old snake. Skylar hadn't realized that until he met up with Scamander later on, staying a couple weeks out on the man's animal reservation just to help out the best he could. Scamander was sharp, he clued in a lot faster as to why Skylar was suddenly fond of manual labour. The man wasn't happy, but he couldn't say much.

Aidian Lupin was due any day now; Tonks was *huge* with pregnancy and graciously accepting everything others practically threw at her. The day Sirius wandered onto the small house and found his friend walking on his own, the man broke into tears and nearly tackled the rehabilitative man to the floor.

Ron went back to his family, preferring to take the next year off before returning to his schooling if only to help soothe the gap of having lost so many siblings. Percy had passed away, and was buried out with Ginny's monument grave. Charlie was severely injured, and it was unlikely that he'd be able to walk without a limp and the uncoordinated left arm. Scamander took him under his wing and instantly hired the man on the spot for one of his many reservations.

Skylar hadn't heard much of the others, he spotted Theodore Nott one day while he was skirting around St. Mungos. Skylar didn't hear the full story, but over a small conversation of complementary tea for waiting visitors, Skylar heard about all of the Slytherins' friends. Draco was under a probationary period of time, originally he was facing a jail sentence before a few other students came to his aid and helped validate his backstory. It was mandated that Draco attend various counseling sessions for grieving families who suffered from Dark Magic Attacks. Skylar thought it was unnecessary.

Daphne Greengrass was institutionalized. Theodore Nott didn't talk about her much.

Skylar spent a lot of his time now with Remus and Tonks, helping out wherever he could. He didn't realize how much work went into a pregnancy, especially when the only other in the house struggled to walk most days. Sirius helped out often, Skylar imagined the man felt guilty he hadn't come by more when the war was at its worst.

Skylar had seen his mother on occasion, he stopped by for his dad's funeral and helped lower his casket into the ground. They met up on occasion in public; he thought she was getting some help as well.

"Look at that bushy tail go!" Tonks shouted, despite the fact that Remus was not at all looking wolf life. Remus playfully scowled at her, which only forced Sirius into wolf-whistling as loud as he could. It ended badly, more of a high pitched shrill noise which startled the massive Elkhound from where it was sleeping by the door. They had adopted it not that long back, finding comfort in something large and docile.

Skylar grinned, leaning back against the tree behind him. Lutain hung on snugly, although his scales and grip wasn't what it used to be. Skylar should have thought of it, a Taipan didn't generally live past seven years.

"Well, isn't this just cozy." Skylar grinned, cheeks flushed in delight. Sirius shifted into his

animagus form, the Elkhound perked up in excitement and took off directly afterwards.

Nobody really liked talking about how the castle was damaged- still under renovation. Nobody talked much about Dumbledore or his own tomb made from white marble on the small island in the giant lake near Hogwarts. Nobody talked about how the thestrals all mysteriously vanished that battle, or how a few people could have sworn that they melted away until nothing was left.

“It’s getting late, isn’t it?” Skylar asked the snake around his neck, gently stroking the black scales, “we’ll have to be going soon.”

The snake flickered its tongue. Skylar could practically hear the insult.

“Moony! Padfoot! Tonks!” Skylar shouted, waving one arm, “I’m heading out!”

Tonks glanced up with a beaming smile the boy hadn’t seen in almost a year, “Okay! Be safe! Send an owl!”

Sirius barked, Remus lifted one arm and all on his own, waved.

Skylar hesitated one moment, watching the scene with an affectionate twist on his mouth. He watched a while longer, before he summoned his courage and turned and hiked into the woods.

Not too many people knew about it, but if you kept walking and walking and walked a bit further, to the point where you felt lost and lonesome and kept walking, you’d find a nondescript grave. It was a nice grave, made out of dark stone that crumbled a bit on the edges. Shale or some other stone that was just as impractical as Adrian’s’ taste in it. He lived to make other people lives’ hell.

Skylar smiled at it, tracing his hand along the small grave. He helped lower it down alongside Scamander, who warded it and contained his remains so that the parasite would never spread any further.

“Well, nice to see you.” Skylar greeted the stone. He took a seat, gently sitting on the forest floor in front of the monument. “I know I was here just last day, but well, you know.”

The stone didn’t answer, but Skylar didn’t mind.

“Anyways,” Skylar smiled, feeling the April sunshine on his skin. He always felt so cold now. His bones pressed against his skin so sharply; his casual use of magic hadn’t been doing him any favours either. “I know that we kinda figured things out at the end but...well..”

Skylar shifted unsure, pulling out his wand to hold gently in his hand. He sniffled, ignoring the small nosebleed and the piercing migraine he was sure was going to pop up.

“Well…” Skylar trailed off unsure, eyes scanning towards the side where a small section of warded ground had been burned into the dirt. He spent nearly a day working on it, copying carefully the intricate little motions and marks Scamander drew out for him.

Lutain shifted, staring at Skylar with old tired eyes.

A wind whispered through the clearing, stirring up some of the dead leaves that survived the winter. Small vegetation was starting to grow; Skylar always did like spring.

“Well Lutain,” Skylar hummed, content for the first time in a very long time. “We wouldn’t want to keep Adrian waiting.”

Luna jerked awake with a gasp.

Her head hurt a little, a small buzzing throb that was fading already. The grass under her was soft, like the moss that nestled between large tree roots.

The air felt crisp and clean, gentle although not humid. She couldn't place the taste in the air, or the strange feeling of familiarity that bothered her.

The sun above her was warm, heating her skin in a way she never thought of much before. It felt wonderful, she wiggled her toes in the light.

She smiled lightly, running fingers through the grass and slight clover that poked up curiously from between the strands. Violets appeared further down, vibrant and pastel in the sunlight.

A bird fluttered above her, large but not one she recognized. It peered down at her, jerking its head to observe her with both eyes.

"Hello," She smiled at the bird, reaching out although she knew she wouldn't be able to touch it. "You're pretty, aren't you?"

Someone chuckled behind her, she nearly launched herself upwards to bounce clumsily off the balls of her feet. She spun around, thankful she was wearing her work trousers although they did have some bright grass stains.

Someone was standing there looking at her, a healthy distance away but still close enough to have seen her when she was asleep. She didn't like that, although something foreign and hazy whispered at her. She didn't like it, and it felt odd.

"Those are some wicked grass stains," The stranger said, seemingly having a strange fixation with her knees, "bloody hell, that's so much better than white dresses."

Luna shifted backwards self-consciously, not liking how the sun made a glare in her eyes. The stranger was taller than her, thin too like a beanpole.

"Who are you?" She asked, careful and cautious. She didn't have her wand on her, which confused her a little bit. She didn't know where she *was.*

Whoever the man was inhaled sharply, almost baffled.

Then he laughed, a low smooth noise that didn't help her confusion at all.

"Right, yeah," the man stumbled through the words almost giddy, "yeah just, *wow.* Alright, so uh, my name is Adrian-."

" *Adrian?"* Luna cut him off, her voice breathy like an exhale, mixed with a gasp and a murmur all in one. The stranger paused, waiting patiently.

Luna took one unsure step forward. The bird was still chirping above them, fluttering its wings on occasion.

She got a bit closer and could see detail, how he wasn't actually thin by build but instead looked horribly thin. Sickly really, his eyes were bright and wrong and felt very ill with the limp broken ends of his hair.

“Hey,” he smiled, gums bright and discoloured and teeth seeming too large in his mouth. “It’s ah, it’s been a while.”

Luna stared, and took a half step backwards.

The stranger’s face twitched, faltering slightly, then one hand ran anxiously through his hair. It parted it, and maybe it was the light or maybe it was the familiar nervous gesture, but something in it *worked* and then Luna was smiling timidly.

“Adrian?” She asked quietly, wanting to step back but also run forward, “I- you-.”

Adrian, (that smile could *only* be him) *beamed.* His entire face lit up, the scars on his face contorted and the concave hollows of his cheeks looked worse. His eyes looked feral and bright and he looked like a skeleton.

His voice though, was so happy and recognizable.

“Yes!” He urged excitedly, “I- I hadn’t realized how much I changed. I didn’t think about it, I- I’m sorry,”

Luna cautiously came closer, until she reached out and took one of his long bony hands in hers. She twisted it, flipping it over and over to trace the small pock marks and scars from something, and the way the joints stuck out so far.

“You look horrible.” Luna’s nose wrinkled as she spotted the colour of his veins and arteries, “worse than usual.”

Adrian *laughed,* beaming. “Right, yeah, I mean, I’m disgusting for sure. Wow, I haven’t heard you insult me in forever.”

Luna felt whiplash, “you...you *want* me to insult you?”

Adrian grinned brightly, “I’m not that sensitive anymore. Oh, I have *so much* to tell you. Do you remember anything about being a thestral?”

“ *What?”*

“About me being Harry Potter? Or killing my father- Voldemort, although James Potter is dead too I think-.”

Luna made a small noise of distress. Adrian grabbed her, yanked her into his chest and hugged her so tight she couldn’t breathe.

“Let me out!” She yowled in surprise and sudden delight. “This isn’t fair! It’s illegal!”

“You going to send a howler after me?” He shouted back, folding backwards to send both of them to the ground. The grass absorbed their impact, catching them as they defied gravity.

“Adrian Selwyn you are the *worst!”*

“I know!” Adrian cheered in delight, “Oh my- okay Luna, Luna so. So I went off and I broke a dragon out of Gringotts!”

She gaped in surprise, “you did *not.”*

“I did!” Adrian chortled in delight, “It was after Skylar and Scamander met up-.”

“Stop!” Luna cried, dramatically flinging her arms around, “you- you mean you talked to Skylar Potter! *Civilly?”*

Adrian grinned, and Luna wasn’t so sure the sun was above her.

“I did!”

“And you *met Newt Scamander?”*

“I think I threw my drink at him!” Adrian was nearly cackling in delight, “I threw my drinks at a lot of people! Both metaphorically and literally! I also set a lot of buildings on fire, Luna! So many buildings!”

Luna opened her mouth, closed it, and failed to stop the bubble of confused and exhilarated laughter from breaking through her mouth.

‘I think I’m going to like it here,’ she thought to herself happily.

“Hey Luna? What’s the last thing you ever said to me?”

Luna looked at Adrian, tilting her head in thought before she shrugged. “I don’t remember. Does it really matter?”

Adrian threw his head back with a loud laugh,

and finally,

felt at peace.

Thank you all, for joining me on this adventure. It was rough at times, difficult and painful to us all, but we’ve made it in the end, haven’t we?

I originally wrote this story as a challenge to myself, something to pass the time. This changed, and with my love and all of you, this became our passion.

It wasn’t easy, even I can say that, but this story was made to be realistic. Nothing is easy, we all have our struggles that we smile through. We learned our lessons, or

maybe we read them and recognized them.

Don’t waste your life trying to impress people that don’t care about you.

Even if you do everything right, you may still fail.

Don’t neglect your health; physical, mental.

Find your passion, even if it’s small or unimportant; it will save you when you feel lost.

Family doesn’t depend on your birth.

People lie to you, people betray you, people love you.

You are not invincible, no matter how intelligent or strong. Your actions have consequence.

We make our own path, we fight our own monsters no matter how innocent they seem.

We all have a bit of Adrian Selwyn in us, and I finished this tragedy with him healing.

I hope, that somewhere along the way, you have as well.

Artwork that you all have made

Questions and Answers for this story

Discord invite; if you scream at me loud enough, sometimes I scream back

Check out my newest work, Diablerie

If you're curious about Donations, or a way to thank me, click here!

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, for everything.

End Notes

Join the discord server to scream at me and I'll scream back!

Works inspired by this one

Red Banner by galimau, Pride and Ridicule by skittykitty, the parasite became me (but did i ever exist?) by skittykitty, Antítesis by MarGC, In One Universe, In All Universes by silver_drip, Shadowed Malice by

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